

# MARCH OF THE LIVING

## ~ OUR STORIES ~

A Collection from the  
Holocaust Survivors of the  
Los Angeles Delegation of BJE

JAN BERLFEIN BURNS





East Central Europe 1937







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Other books and photographic journals by Jan Berlfein Burns

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*BJE Adult March of the Living  
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Cover photo: Begleiter Family (Berlin, Germany, circa 1928)

Adela, Willy, Manya, Sigi (Hart), and Herman

(The Begleiter family name was changed to Hartmayer in 1935)

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This book is dedicated to the memory of our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends who died as a result of the Nazi genocide of World War II.

May their memories be for a blessing.



Pesa Balter (Paula Lebovics),  
Sara Sylman, Pela Rosset (left to right)  
Displaced Persons Camp  
Föhrenwald, Germany  
1947

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## Foreword

*“Lech lecha,”* routinely translated as “Go forth,” was the first call to the first of our forefathers, father Abram, who, while not yet Abraham, was bidden by God to leave his land, the place of his birth, the house of his father, and go to the land that was to be shown to him.

It is never easy to respond to the call of Jewish history.

The Hebrew is a bit complicated. *Lech* surely means *to go*. But *lecha* can have a double meaning as “on to yourself” or “for yourself.” Every journey outward is also a journey inward.

*Place* is a geographical term but also a spiritual one.

In ancient religions, Judaism included, pilgrimage was an early but all important ritual. The three great Jewish festivals, Passover, Shavuot, and Succoth, were pilgrimage festivals when the ancient Israelites set forth to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices in the Holy Temple. In Islam, the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, is one of the five pillars of Islam, an obligation of every Muslim, at least once in their life.

Jews no longer have the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, but the ritual of pilgrimage has returned to play an important role in our life as a people. For many, the pilgrimage is an “ascent” to the Holy Land, a visit to Israel to see sacred sites, ancient sites, Jerusalem and Masada, the Western Wall, archeological remains, but also the thriving modern cities of Israel. In the last dozen years or so, young people have been offered their “birthright,” a free ten-day trip of great intensity to see the land of their ancestors, a trip designed to infuse them with new or renewed connection to the Jewish people and to Jewish history.

But there is another form of pilgrimage, and from my experience, an

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even more intense encounter with Jewish history, that has taken root in our days. For the past 36 years – double chai – more than 150,000 young Jews, more than 1% of the Jewish people, have set out on a pilgrimage to revisit the 20th century journey of the Jewish people. They go forth from their homes in every continent where Jews dwell, to Poland to encounter the sites of pre-war Jewry and to visit the death camps of Auschwitz and Majdanek as well as Treblinka and the cities where Jews were confined in ghettos before their destruction, such as Warsaw and Krakow, perhaps even Lodz.

And then, they go from Poland – which when occupied by the Germans during World War II became the site of death and destruction – to Israel, the locus of the rebirth and the renewal of the Jewish people in the aftermath of destruction.

Most important, they do not travel alone.

It is fair to say that in Poland they are accompanied by ghosts—the Presence of Absence, the Jews who once were and are no longer, and despite the modest but moving rebirth of the Jewish community of Poland, they also encounter the Absence of Presence, Jewish sites without Jews, synagogues that once housed thriving Jewish communities, legendary towns which were once the home of Hasidic Masters and thriving secular Jewish culture, which are bereft of their Jews.

But their guides are the most important part of the trip. The founders of the March of the Living were wise. They believed that students must be accompanied by survivors, eyewitnesses to the Holocaust, men and women who in their very being lived in the three epochs of 20th century Jewish history, Before, During, and After.

The Jewish calendar had remained essentially unchanged for more



~ Foreword ~

than a millennium until the past generation when three dates were added to the Jewish calendar. *Yom Hasboah v'hagevurah*, Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day, followed one week later by *Yom Hazikaron*, Remembrance Day for those who were killed in Israel's wars, which is the day before *Yom Haatzma'ut*, Israel Independence Day, commemorating the founding of the state of Israel only three years after the Holocaust. In a deliberate, yet exquisite bit of timing, adding to the power of the pilgrimage, the March of the Living visits Birkenau on *Yom Hasboah* and arrives in Israel to observe the two Israeli sacred days. These pilgrims reenact modern Jewish history at the most sacred times on the Jewish calendar. And they are accompanied, at least for now, by those who have lived this history, who embody this history.

The encounters between students and survivors are precious, dare I say holy; precious for the student pilgrims who don't merely encounter the place but the people who lived in that place, who can tell of that place, who can personalize a place that was dedicated to the depersonalization of killing, to making Jews non-persons even before killing them.

And the encounter is precious to the survivors, who can share of their experience and who are transformed in the places where they were so brutally victimized into witnesses and teachers, into symbols of resilience, renewal, and rebirth.

Survivors bear witness, they tell their story, and students become witnesses to the witnesses. The students claim this experience as their own and understand the urgency of Israel, the majesty of Israel, and the importance of their own place in Jewish history.

This book seeks to capture in words and images what is often communicated most deeply in silence, in the embrace between a

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survivor and a student, in the look on one's face, in the tears that are shed, and even in the smiles that pass between survivors and students.

It is a remembrance of a pilgrimage, much like a travel album of the last generation, which reminds us of where we have been and with whom, but more importantly, it is also an invitation to walk in their steps and to share their path.

This is an opportunity that will sadly be offered to this generation alone because soon, all too soon, the last survivor will be no longer and all that will remain are the witnesses to the witness; we who can share their story, who can walk in their path, and who must give voice to their testimony.

So we must be grateful to this work for what it seeks to capture and immortalize, for the gift that it affords and the challenge it presents. It is a personal honor to share in this work as I know these survivors and I feel blessed to have known them and worked with them over the years. I also know how many of these men and women have left us. To share in their remembrance is a privilege.

Every journey outward is also a journey inward, so as you read this in the privacy of your soul, in the deepest recesses of your inwardness, please also treat it as a call to journey outward to revisit the path of Jewish history in the 20th century and to claim it as your own in this turbulent 21st century.

Michael Berenbaum  
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Professor of Jewish Studies  
American Jewish University  
Los Angeles, California

## Preface

I never read the book *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. I knew the ending and couldn't face reading about what had led up to it. I was well into my adult years before I recognized that most of the people I knew from my parents' generation – those with European accents – were not shtetl immigrants as my grandparents were, but Holocaust survivors and war refugees, something not openly discussed at that time. Pieces of their stories came through, but not in a coherent way. It was a shadow subject in my youth.

Henry Kahn owned the photography lab where my mother had her photographs processed. It was a very small storefront on Wilshire Boulevard in West Los Angeles. As kids we were often carted along when my mother did her errands, so I frequented Mr. Kahn's shop throughout my youth. The bell at the front door would jingle when a customer entered the shop. We would wait patiently until Mr. Kahn emerged from processing photographs in the darkroom at the back. He seemed very distinguished to me with his German accent, starched white shirt and tie, and darkroom apron. He had been a lawyer in his pre-war life in Germany. My mother told me that when he came to this country he was too old to start over as a lawyer, so he picked up and made a profession from a former hobby. This was all we knew.

There was a sadness about Mr. Kahn and a sadness about his wife, too, who also worked in the shop. They had no children. Well, they'd had no children together. Mrs. Kahn, also a survivor, had had a

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husband and daughter in her pre-war life. She and her daughter were gunned down into a mass grave somewhere. She survived by playing dead and crawling out from the mass of dead bodies, leaving her dead daughter behind and escaping into the forest.

I never heard these stories firsthand. They came through references, whispers, secondhand, thirdhand. Were they true? Were they embellished or censored? All I knew was that they were too dark to talk about in a past too recent to explore.

Mr. and Mrs. Kahn have long since died. Where are their stories now? Did they ever pass them along to anyone? Are they remembered by anyone? Who will remember them now?

Our Jewish tradition teaches us *L'dor v'dor*, that we are obligated to tell the stories of our people, from generation to generation. In the case of the Holocaust, this obligation comes with the admonition “Never Again.” We do this not to carry the burden of hatred and victimization, but to learn of the resilience of the human spirit. We do this because in spite of all the horror, grief, and tragedy these survivors experienced, their testimonies show us how they made new lives in new lands, how they raised families, how they contributed to their communities, and how they have had the courage to revisit the land of their youth and share their experiences, no matter how painful.

Not all readers of this book will have had the extraordinary privilege to meet these survivors firsthand. But for all of the students past and present from the BJE March of the Living delegation who have, this book was written with you in mind. We all are now entrusted with their legacy. So tuck this book away with some special keepsakes and when the time is right bring it out to share with your children (and hopefully grandchildren, too!). For those of you who traveled

~ Preface ~

to Poland with these survivors, keep their stories alive. Share how you stood on the selection ramp in Birkenau listening to these stories firsthand. Talk about how you stood beside Sidonia in the barracks when she showed you the bunk she shared with five other girls and one blanket and told you her “apple story.” Remember how you stood near Paula in Auschwitz when she showed you the photograph of herself as a child taken by her Russian liberators. Relive the moment when you sat in front of the ruins of a gas chamber as Jack told his story about watching his young sister Peska being herded with a group of young and old women into that very gas chamber.

In my youth these stories had little audience. The nightmares were too close, the horrors too near. Giving audience to these survivors now, listening to their stories, engaging in their lives, does not replace a lost youth. It does, however, enable survivors to connect with generations of young people. And this is a blessing.

Jan Berlfein Burns  
Los Angeles, California

## Author's note on use of names

Many survivors have changed their names over the course of their lifetime. Some names were changed from Polish, Hebrew, or Yiddish to English; some were used as a false identity during the war; and some were changed through marriage. I tried to accurately identify survivors in photos by their name at the time the photo was taken. Brackets following a name indicate the name as the survivor is known today.

In keeping with Jewish tradition, once a person has died his or her written name is followed by the Hebrew letters ל"ט (Zichronam Livracha), which means "Of Blessed Memory." To honor the memory of those who died during World War II as well as those who have died in more recent years, the abbreviation ל"ט has been used on the memorial pages of this book.

I've listed below the names of the survivors as they are known today. I've also included other names they have used to identify themselves.

**Sigi Hart** also known as Sigi Begleiter, Sigi Hartmayer

**Sidonia Lax** also known as Sidonia Lewin

**Paula Lebovics** also known as Pesa Balter

**Gabriella Karin** also known as Gaby Foldes

**Emil Jacoby** also known as Menachem Jakubovics, Emil Jakubovics, Menachem Uziel, Uzi

**Halina Wachtel** also known as Chayele Szuldenrein, Halina Chromin

**Jack Adler** also known as Yacob Szlamek Adler

**Natalie Gold** also known as Natalie Weinstein, Natalie Yazinska

**Eva Perlman** also known as Eva Gutmann

**Dorothy Greenstein** also known as Dvorah Kirszenbaum, Zofia Leszczinska

**Erika Jacoby** also known as Erika Engel

## A note about photographs

Family photographs are a window into memory. For some Holocaust survivors, no such record exists of their families before the war. For others, there may be remnants, photographs of family occasions mailed to relatives in America or in what was then Palestine. These photographs were often shared images of joyous events or family news, and now they preciousely preserve lost memories and broken families.

Unless otherwise noted below, photographs from each chapter come from the personal archives of the survivors.

Photo credits

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"We had been on the run since we left Berlin in 1939 and miraculously had managed to keep our family together." *Sigi Hart*

"I was nine years old when my sisters Chaya and Hanna were among the first from our town to be taken to Treblinka and murdered by the Nazis."  
*Paula Lebovics*

"Havana, Cuba, with its palm trees, warm sunshine, and colorful Latin culture, was a world away from the ruins of war-torn Europe. How would we fit into this new world as Jewish Hungarian refugees?" *Erika Jacoby*

"...my mother, at the advice of my grandfather, hid her diamonds and gold in a false bottom bucket, which was left untouched." *Robert Geminder*

"My father went out in search of an apple and was arrested just like my mother had been. I was now entirely on my own."  
*Sidonia Lax*



“Every day we went to the railroad station to see if we saw any familiar faces among those returning from the concentration camps.” *Gabriella Karin*

“I spoke Polish very well, I had blonde braids and blue eyes, I had a birth certificate identifying me as a Polish girl ....Still my daily fear was that I’d be discovered to be a Jewish girl.” *Dorothy Greenstein*

“We saved Peska once, but this time was different. I had been able to protect her for over two years, but now I was helpless.” *Jack Adler*

“He fixed a metal crucifix to a necklace and hung it on their daughter.” *Natalie Gold*

“I was to establish one of the escape routes out of Hungary and then continue on to Bucharest where I would head up rescue operations.” *Emil Jacoby*

“If I know her, she will dash out immediately, and if she falls into the hands of the Nazis, on her bicycle laden with men’s clothing, she will be accused of supplying the Résistance, and her fate will be sealed.” *Eva Perlman*

“The second time I escaped out of the Warsaw Ghetto...” *Halina Wachtel*



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## Sigi Hart's Story



Begleiter Family  
Adela, Willy, Manya, Sigi (Hart), and Herman  
(The Begleiter family name was changed to Hartmayer in 1935)  
Berlin, Germany  
circa 1928

## ~ A HAPPY-GO-LUCKY KID ~

Stories most often associated with the Holocaust are often about cattle cars crammed with starving Jews, numbers tattooed on forearms, concentration camps, slave labor, gas chambers, and death. These horrors and deprivations are part of my story too, but prior to surviving that part of the war, I had an exciting boyhood adventure.

I was a happy-go-lucky kid. I always saw the glass half-full rather than half-empty. During the buildup to the war and throughout its first years, I was too young to be aware of all that my parents were confronting – these early years of the war were a big adventure for me as we moved from one place to the next, constantly trying to stay one step ahead of or away from the Nazis.

I was born in Berlin on November 15, 1925, to Adela and Herman Begleiter. (Our name was changed in 1935 to Hartmayer, my father's mother's name, in order to validate their marriage under German law.) Until Hitler came to power, our family life had been quite comfortable. My father was a salesman. He traveled all week and returned home each Friday. My mother was a good cook and baker. For Shabbos she would make a beautiful challah, and I remember her delicious chicken soup. Life was good.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, my parents must have been concerned because my mother took all of us (my brother, Wolf (Willy), my sister, Manya, and me) to be with her family in Ocwiecim (Auschwitz), the town in Poland where she was born. After a year in Ocwiecim, when the initial concerns about Hitler seemed to calm down, we returned to Berlin.



Sigi (Hart), Herman, and  
Willy Hartmayer

~ Sigi Hart ~

In Berlin I went to a Jewish boys' school called Kaiserstrasser but was taught early on not to be recognized, to stand out, or draw attention to myself as a Jew. As Jewish kids we couldn't play ordinary childhood games in the street without getting beaten up by the other kids. Starting in 1935 we were forbidden from going into city parks. Signs plastered on all the benches read "Nicht für Juden" (Not for Jews).

The community center in our synagogue became our refuge. After school we went to the center instead of playing in the streets. We did our homework there, and played chess and ping-pong with the other Jewish kids. I sang in the choir in shul and began to prepare for my bar mitzvah.

However, by 1938 the situation in Berlin had grown worse. The Nazis went from house to house rounding up all the Polish men, taking them to the police station and deporting them to the Polish border. My father, who was Polish, narrowly missed this deportation by hiding under the bed when the policemen came to our apartment to collect him. A few days later he turned himself in to the authorities, but they dismissed him, informing him that the "action" for that particular roundup was over.

The following month, when my brother and I left our house for school one morning, we walked out into the street and saw smoke in the distance. Our synagogue down the street was in flames. We quickly returned to the safety of our apartment, and I didn't go to school that day. But my younger brother, Willy, unlike me, didn't look Jewish with his blond hair and blue eyes, so my parents sent him out into the streets to see what was going on. He returned with reports that people were carrying picket signs, which read, "Don't buy from the Jews." All the windows to the stores owned by Jews had been smashed, glass was covering all the streets, and merchandise from the

~ A Happy-Go-Lucky Kid ~

Jewish shops was being looted.

The pogrom that has come to be known as Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass, happened November 9, 1938. Our burned-down synagogue was a casualty of the destruction perpetrated throughout our community and all of Germany on that day. I had been studying with the rabbi for my bar mitzvah, which was to be held on the Shabbos following my thirteenth birthday, on November 15, 1938.

My parents went to the rabbi to discuss what should be done about my bar mitzvah, considering the events of Kristallnacht. Together they decided we should hold it as planned and notified all my relatives that they should still come to the service on Shabbos. A small house behind the synagogue was offered as a gathering place. To this day I am brought to tears at the memory of the burned Torah scrolls lying on the floor in a corner of the burned-out sanctuary. While I chanted my bracha and performed the other rituals of my bar mitzvah, three or four people stood guard outside, watching for the Nazi SS police. The rabbi cried as he stood next to me delivering his blessing and these words, "Remember, never forget." By our traditions, this was the day I was to become a man. It was supposed to be the happiest day of my life, but it was bittersweet.

Never imagining how bad things would become, my parents recognized the threat to Jews, especially Polish Jews in Germany, as early as 1936 or 1937. They began the process of trying to secure visas so we could leave Germany. We had relatives in America who provided the necessary affidavits, but immigration from Poland had exceeded its quota, causing the wait for visas to America to be as long as five years. My parents also tried to get visas to China and Burma, without success.

After my bar mitzvah my parents decided that, visa or no visa, we

~ Sigi Hart ~

could no longer stay in Germany. The greatest danger was for my father. (At this time, women and children were not yet being harassed or deported by the Nazis.) My father learned that if he were smuggled into Belgium as a refugee, the government wouldn't deport him for lack of a visa. So two months after my bar mitzvah, in January 1939, my father paid someone to smuggle him over the border into Belgium. He went to Antwerp, and after he was somewhat settled he sent a message through underground sources to my mother that it was time for her to bring the family to join him.

My mother shared none of this information with my sister or brother or me for fear we would be questioned or speak out in error. But in anticipation of our journey, she uncharacteristically bought us all winter boots – something we'd always wanted but had never owned before. We each packed a little suitcase with as much as we could carry on our own. My mother closed and locked the door to our apartment, our home, and we left.

She had been instructed to take the train to Aachen, a city near the Belgian border, and from there to take a smaller train to Roetgen, a town right on the border. My mother and I sat in one train car and my brother and sister, Willy and Manya, sat in another so as not to arouse suspicion that we were traveling together as a family.

In Aachen my mother and I got off the train to make our connection with the smaller train going to Roetgen, and we boarded. We were separated from Manya and Willy in the crowd and they missed their connection. My mother didn't know that Aachen would have such a big train station.

In Roetgen my mother and I found our way to the designated pensione (hotel and restaurant). Located on the border, it was where we met three or four other grownups who were to be smuggled over



~ A Happy-Go-Lucky Kid ~

the border with us. When the smuggler, who had already been paid, met up with our group, my mother explained to him how we had lost contact with Manya and Willy in Aachen. The smuggler said, “You can stay and wait for them or come with the group. We’re leaving here at 10 o’clock tonight.” I imagine now that it was a decision filled with anguish for my mother, but she decided that she and I would leave with the group and not wait for Manya and Willy.

Our little group started out at night walking through the woods under a light rain. As the night got colder, the rain became snow. Silently we followed our smuggler guide for five hours through the woods until he told us to wait in the forest while he fetched a car. It seemed like hours that our group of refugee strangers huddled together trying to keep warm against the pelting rain and snow. Finally, blinking its headlights, a car approached. We ran to squeeze seven people into the car, which delivered us safely to Antwerp, where my father was waiting for us.

If my parents had recounted this story, I imagine they would have told it with a knowledge of circumstances beyond my limited worldview. But I was just thirteen years old, a man, according to my bar mitzvah, though still unaware of all the dangers at hand. Manya and Willy (having had their own adventures) eventually met up with the rest of the family in Antwerp. So with my family intact, but on the run, my boyhood adventure continued.

In Antwerp we found an empty storefront that couldn’t be rented as such. With the front windows painted opaque white, we moved in and had a place to live. The language in Belgium is Flemish, but none of us knew how to speak it. Antwerp was known as a trading center for diamonds. My father, needing to earn money to care for us, would buy cigarettes wholesale, go to the Bourse – the diamond district – and sell them to the retailers. I’m sure my father found a way to

~ Sigi Hart ~

communicate with his customers without speaking Flemish because the diamond business was predominantly run by Jews. My sister, who was sixteen years old by then, worked as a nanny for a Jewish family and was fed in their home, which meant one less mouth to feed in ours. We survived the best we could. Both my parents had an optimistic attitude toward life. We all hoped the war would soon be over and we could go home.

In the meantime, my brother and I, inheriting our optimistic outlook from our parents, made the most of our time in Antwerp. As my parents were still taking care of us, we had no worries. In Belgium we could play outside in the park. And the Jewish committee had opened a lunch restaurant in the city where we would meet other refugee children. Willy and I joined the choir at the synagogue, and in January 1940 we celebrated Willy's bar mitzvah. It was a joyous day.

By now Germany was at war with Poland, France, and Russia, but Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg were still free. We became more settled in Belgium. We moved to a better apartment, fixed it up to make it more comfortable, and began to think our good fortune would last forever.

On May 10, 1940, Germany invaded Belgium and bombarded Antwerp. Belgium was a very small country and Germany was very strong. Being German refugees in Belgium, where would we run to now? We rushed to the Central railway station in Antwerp. No one knew which direction to go. People from Brussels were coming to Antwerp and visa-versa. We took a train the short distance to Brussels, where we found the Brussels rail terminal to be in pandemonium. In the station was a very long train and we boarded it. We had no tickets, nor did we know where the train was going, but we boarded nonetheless.

~ A Happy-Go-Lucky Kid ~

I don't really know how the train kept moving with the bombing all around, but after a couple of days of traveling, the train crossed the border into France. I had just started to learn Flemish and now we were in France. French and British soldiers guarded the border. We opened the windows of the train car and yelled "Vive la France." As children we picked up new languages quickly. Though France was already at war with Germany, it was a big country so we thought we would be safe there.

Our train was not a scheduled one, but it kept going day after day. The Red Cross set up stands at major train stations, where we were able to get something to eat. After about eight days of travel, the train came to the end of the line. We were in southern France at the base of the Pyrenees in a village called Bagnères-de-Luchon. (Of the 12,000 refugees in the village, probably 300 to 400 of them were Jews.)

The villagers of Luchon did their best to accommodate the inflow of refugees, putting us up in hotels and feeding us for a few weeks. In June the French army capitulated and Germany took occupation of most of the country. Luchon, on the southernmost border of France, was within the jurisdiction of the Vichy French government.

For two to three months, Luchon was cut off from all radio communication. We got our news from a drummer who walked through the town calling out announcements. This is how we learned that as Jews, we had to register ourselves to get tickets for all of our rations of food and supplies. My parents now set about to look for living quarters. Out of nowhere, a Jewish committee appeared to offer assistance. They always seemed to pop up like mushrooms and be ready to help. We found an apartment in a print shop and I began to learn to speak French. Just as we were settling in, the town drummer marched through the village and announced that all

~ Sigi Hart ~

Jews must leave. Our family, still intact, boarded a cattle car and was transported to a work camp in Agde, a three to four hour train ride from Luchon.

The internment camp at Agde was a rotten place. All the barracks were empty and not at all prepared for the families that would now be occupying them. Upon arrival, the boys and men were sent out to the field to gather straw from a big haystack. The soldiers gave us sacks and the women stuffed the straw into the sacks to make bedding for everyone. Our own shirts were the only sheets we had. Families were divided. The men and boys were separated from the women, girls, and young children and sent to barracks in an adjoining camp. At first I stayed with my mother, and for me this was all part of my big adventure. I got to sleep on a straw mattress on the ground just like on a camping trip. Outside the barracks we had a big playground where I played with the other kids. We found some old military helmets and played war games. We threw rocks for fun. No one told us we weren't allowed to play outside, like in Berlin. And as a kid, I was not aware of the troubles known to my parents in the internment camp.

In January 1941 Willy got sick and was taken to the hospital in the local town of Béziers. The internment camp was not that restrictive, so my mother was given permission to leave the camp on a Sunday to visit Willy in the hospital. Then I got sick and was sent to the same hospital. Willy was on the second floor and I was on the third. One Sunday both my parents got permission to come with Manya and visit us in the hospital (we were both much better by then). They came at noon, took Willy from the hospital room he shared with about twenty patients, and then came for me. We all just walked out of the hospital together and boarded a train back to Luchon.

In Luchon we returned to the print shop where we had earlier rented an apartment. The printer told us that his son Clement Gazave, who

~ A Happy-Go-Lucky Kid ~

lived in Juzet-de-Luchon, a little mountain hamlet outside the village of Luchon, would take us in. Their house had only three rooms, but M. Gazave's wife and two children made room for our family of five and we moved in with them.

We lived as peasants through that winter in the high mountain village. In the evenings we sat around the fireplace in the small living quarters and conversed in broken French with our new family. I made myself useful by working with nearby farmers. I took their cows out to pasture. I helped to cut trees for firewood. I learned how to ride a horse and how to cross-country ski. I ate well and was strong from the work I did. I still couldn't judge my parents' thoughts, but for me the time spent in the French Pyrenees was a vacation and an exciting adventure.

The village mayor knew we were hiding with the Gazave family. After we had lived there for about a year, he began to pressure them to send us away. Finally, we were given papers to go to another town, Aulus-les-Bains, near the border of Andorra. This town had a larger Jewish community (and of course, a Jewish committee!). But my father knew this would eventually become a problem because there were too many Jews together in one place, thus making us an easier Nazi target.

Word came one night that the Nazis were coming to round up and deport all the Jews in Aulus-les-Bains. With this forewarning, our family packed up in the middle of the night and hiked up into the mountains outside of town. Then my father sent me back down to the town to survey what was happening. There were no Nazis. It had been a false alarm, so we all came back down from the mountains. That night we were warned again that the Nazis were coming. Not to take any chances, my father insisted we return to the mountains, though Manya complained that she just wanted to stay and get a

~ Sigi Hart ~

good night's sleep. The second warning proved accurate. Nazis came into the town and rounded up all the Jews. Fortunately, we listened to my father and had climbed further up into the mountains, where we stayed for about six weeks until we were finally caught.

Though we had been on the run since we left Berlin in 1939, we miraculously had managed to keep our family together. Once we were caught in the mountains, our luck began to run out. We were all sent to the internment camp in Gurs, but Manya, Willy, and I were forced to go on from there to girls' and boys' work farms. My father escaped from the camp in Gurs and made his way to Nice. My mother was now in Gurs alone, where she stayed until the end of the war.

Nice, on the French Riviera, bordered Italy. Under Italian control, in spite of their alliance with the Germans, the Italians did not pursue the Jews. Nice was a bit of a safe haven for them. When Italy switched sides and joined the Allied forces, the Nazis took control of Nice and the Jews were again in danger.

Somehow my father managed to communicate with Manya, Willy, and me and sent us some money so we could meet him in Nice. But once the Italians retreated from France, we were on the run again. We joined a large group of Jews and hiked on a three-day trek over the Alps, making our way into Italy.



Sigi (Hart) and Willy Hartmayer with group who escaped France hiking the Alps into Italy



Manya Hartmayer (Breuer) with American soldier celebrating Allied liberation of Rome

~ A Happy-Go-Lucky Kid ~

Still we were not safe. Wherever there were Nazis, they were hunting down Jews, and this was now the case in Italy too. Once in Italy, Manya continued on to Rome. My father, Willy, and I went to Florence, where we were hidden for a time in an old movie theater with several other Jewish refugees.

But this is where my luck seriously ran out. When the theater was raided by the Nazis, the entire group of refugees (except Willy, who managed to escape by finding a better hiding place) was taken to a horse stable to await transport to somewhere else.

Always resourceful, my father and I found a way to climb out of the toilet area where we were being held for transport the following morning. But as my father went first and climbed the rungs of the wall, he dropped something that made a clamor and alerted the guards. He was able to escape over the wall, but when it was my turn to scale the wall, a guard now stood at the spot from where I was to follow my father and make my getaway. I was trapped and alone.

The next morning our group of prisoners was ushered out to the rail lines. Painted across the doors of the cattle cars awaiting us was the word Auschwitz. I didn't know where that was or what it was. The date was November 13, 1943, nearly five years to the day since I had become a bar mitzvah in the little house behind the burned-out synagogue in Berlin. In spite of the war, my youth had been extended under the shelter of my parents. I'd made the most of our time running from the Nazis. My glass had always been half-full. Things would be different now. My boyhood adventure came to an abrupt end on that day. Going forward I would need all the strength, courage, and optimism I could muster to survive the nightmare of Auschwitz.

~ Sigi Hart ~



Sigi (Hart) and Adela Hartmayer following  
Sigi's liberation from Auschwitz  
Toulouse, France  
1945



~ A Happy-Go-Lucky Kid ~

Sigi first traveled to Poland on the March of the Living with his son Steve in 1995. He returned several times accompanying the Los Angeles delegates of the BJE March of the Living. On one memorable trip, three of his grandchildren along with eighty other delegates arranged to give him a surprise bar mitzvah celebration in the Tykocin Synagogue in Poland. Wrapped in a tallit and surrounded by joyous young people, Sigi once again became a bar mitzvah and joined in the celebration that had been robbed of him in his youth.

Sigi Hart died in April 2011, weeks before he was to return once more to share his story with the BJE March of the Living Los Angeles delegation. May his memory be for a blessing.



Sigi Hart Bar Mitzvah in Poland with grandchildren  
Nicole Birenbaum, Brandon Hart, and Jeremy Birenbaum

Story written by Jan Berlfein Burns  
as told by Sigi Hart from his Shoah Institute Foundation testimony

~ Sigi Hart ~

In Memory of the  
Sigi Hartmayer (Hart) Family

whose many aunts, uncles, and cousins died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide



Family Wedding  
Sigi Hartmayer (Hart) (front row middle)  
Frankfort, Germany  
circa 1935

~ A Happy-Go-Lucky Kid ~

## Survivors

Sigi Hart ז"ל and Vera Vogel Hart  
Adela Hartmayer ז"ל – mother  
Herman Hartmayer ז"ל – father  
Manya Hartmayer Breuer – sister  
Willy Hartmayer – brother

## The Next Generation

CHILDREN  
(and spouses)

Steve and Tanya Hart  
Carmela and Harry Birenbaum

## GRANDCHILDREN

Brandon, Kevin, and Jason Hart  
Jeremy and Nicole Birenbaum



Hart Family

## Sidonia Lax's Story



Sidonia Lewin (Lax)  
Przemyśl, Poland  
1939

## ~STREET SMARTS AND COMMON SENSE~

It was the winter of 1943. December, in the town of Przemyśl, Poland, where I was born, was always gray and biting cold. We were planning an escape from the underground bunker we had been hiding in inside the ghetto. My mother had formed the plan. She had found us another hiding place outside the ghetto walls. She also knew a Polish policeman who guarded the ghetto gate, so she had paid him off and arranged for the time and place when we were to make our getaway. For his payment, he had promised to turn his back as we passed through the gates. On the appointed morning, my mother was the first to climb out of the bunker and approach the guard. Before my father and I climbed out we heard shots. Something had gone wrong. The regular policeman was not on duty and another, who was eager to arrest Jews, arrested my mother and took her to a jail housed in another Jewish camp within the city. With great fear and uncertainty my father and I returned to the underground bunker.

Before the war my parents owned a successful textile business and my mother, being the more business-oriented, managed it with my father. I was born June 8, 1927, the only child of Cyla and Isaac Lewin. I was a spoiled rotten kid. Since my mother worked in our family business, I was left in the charge of my governess, who spent every waking hour with me. She took me to my many activities – dance lessons, ice-skating, and piano lessons. She even sat by when I



Sidonia Lewin (Lax) and Lewin family members

~ Sidonia Lax ~

played with my friends. At home we had three maids to help with the household chores. However, this didn't keep me from learning how to properly keep house. My mother was a taskmaster and on the maids' day off she taught me all about the art of proper housekeeping. I learned by doing to wash the floors, do the ironing, make the fire for the stove, sew and darn, and even mend damask tablecloths!

Our town of Przemyśl is located in the southeast corner of Poland. When the Germans invaded Poland from the west on September 1, 1939, our town came under German control for a brief time. Not too long after that the Russians invaded Poland from the east and our town was divided between the Germans and the Russians. We lived on the Russian side, and for the two years of Russian occupation, I went to a Russian school. All my classes were conducted in Russian and I quickly learned to read, write, and speak the language fluently. In 1941 the Germans invaded again as they began their march toward Moscow, and as Jews, we were forced to move into a ghetto.

How did we survive in the ghetto? Amazingly enough we survived with the help of young children and funerals. Young children played a critical part in feeding the ghetto community. They were small enough to dig holes under the barbed wire fences and crawl out of our ghetto prison. Once in the city, they traded all sorts of things for extra food and then crawled back under the fence to deliver the much-needed food supplies. Coffins became a useful way to smuggle in extra food, too. People died in the ghetto every day, and the coffins that were used to bury them were constructed with false bottoms so that more food and supplies could be smuggled from the city back into the ghetto.

During the time that I was living in the ghetto, I was ordered to do manual labor. My job was to hammer large boulders into smaller pieces of rock. I suppose this may have been for the building of

~ Street Smarts and Common Sense ~

roads. I don't really know. I just did as I was told by the Kapos (internal Jewish police force), who answered to the Nazis. It was strenuous work particularly for a slight girl of fourteen or fifteen. But it kept me alive. Later in the war, because the ghetto work had kept me healthy and strong, each time I was sent through a selection in a concentration camp, I was directed to the work detail instead of the gas chambers.

After living within the ghetto confines for about a year and a half, our situation had really deteriorated. My parents and some neighbors living in our apartment building decided to carve out a bunker under the building so we could hide from the Nazis. Throughout the night, the men would dig underground, passing the wet dirt to the women, who would spread it out across the floor inside until it dried. Then we would take the dry dirt outside and spread it around. Wet dirt suddenly appearing outside our building would have been an obvious tip off as to what was going on inside during the nights. This was how we built an underground bunker that ultimately held thirty-five people.



Cyla, Sidonia (Lax), and Isaac Lewin

When it was complete, we all disappeared underground. We hid there in darkness for three months. We could stand or sit but there was no room to lie down. The toilet was a hole dug in the corner and used

~ Sidonia Lax ~

by all thirty-five of us. I learned to cope. I was now sixteen years old, and for those three months I never washed myself, brushed my teeth or hair, nor saw the light of day. Our food sources were always scarce. A few days after our attempted escape and my mother's arrest, my father became concerned for my health. He had heard that he might find some apples for sale, but he would have to leave our hiding place to get them. His decision to leave was fateful. It was the last I saw of him. He went out in search of an apple and was arrested just like my mother had been. I was now entirely on my own.

This was December 1943 and the last few weeks before our ghetto was to be liquidated. I had moved into the underground bunker with my parents in September. We had tried to do what we could to save ourselves. By the time my parents were arrested, there were only about ten people from the original thirty-five occupants left in the bunker. Others who had gone out in search of food or attempting escape like my parents had never returned. In the end, those of us remaining were eventually discovered by SS dogs. Somehow I managed to run away from the dogs and hide in an attic a few buildings away. But I was discovered again and sent to a jail cell in the same Jewish camp in Przemyśl where my parents had been sent after their arrest. The camp was run by the Nazi SS lieutenant Joseph Schwammberger.

In jail I learned of the fate of my parents, that they had been shot there. This horrific news was relayed to me by Mrs. Friedman, a friend of my parents. She was free because her husband was one of the Nazis' tailors, but she did what she could to help those who were imprisoned. When my parents were in jail, they had asked her to do what she could to save me if she ever had the chance. She and her husband had some influence over the Jewish policeman who worked under Schwammberger, so she contrived a scheme with him. He approached his superior, Schwammberger, and in an uncharacteristic



~ Street Smarts and Common Sense ~

show of emotion began to cry. Schwammberger asked why he was crying, and the policeman told him a story (devised by Mrs. Friedman) that his fiancée was among the prisoners in the jail cell and he wanted desperately to be alone with her. Schwammberger apparently liked the policeman and responded to his plea by leaving the room. This action was interpreted to mean, “Do whatever you want.” And by this miracle I was called out of the jail cell and separated from the other Jewish prisoners, who were taken to the prison yard and shot. This miracle saved my life for that moment. Later I found out that Schwammberger was the one responsible for the murder of my parents.

Today I reflect back on those times of constant danger and uncertainty. I was a young teen orphaned in a time of war. I did not rebel. I never tried to run away. Sometimes I wish I had, but it was not my temperament. Rather, I learned to cope, to become street smart. I didn’t draw undue attention to myself. I used common sense. My grandmother and my mother had also been guided by common sense and I felt connected to them in that way. My survival depended on adapting to, and being resourceful in, my changing circumstances.

From December 1943 until liberation in 1945, I went where I was told and did what I was told to do. I moved from concentration camp to labor camp and back, as dictated by my captors. I was sent to Auschwitz where I stayed for a few weeks in the barracks in Birkenau before being sent to work in other labor camps. I helped build the barracks at Bergen-Belsen, the work camp where Anne Frank was incarcerated until she died of typhus just before the end of the war. From Bergen-Belsen I was sent to work in different munitions factories. In each place I developed a sense of camaraderie with the other girls and women I lived with. We were in this together and we shared what we could – conversation, scraps of food, shoulders to cry on. Sometimes sleeping as many as ten to one bunk, we pulled

~ Sidonia Lax ~

and tugged over one scratchy blanket between us. But in spite of our connection, I remember no names, no faces, and I maintained no friendships from those times.

The constant during those years of forced labor was hunger. I was always looking for ways to get food. In one camp I figured that if I could provide something useful to the kitchen workers, they might compensate me with a little extra food. Looking around, I noticed a piece of rubber hose on the ground. With some crude tools that I fashioned by myself, I sliced the hose open and attached the rubber pieces to the bottom of a pair of shoes. Suddenly, I was a shoemaker. Through my ingenuity I was able to make the shoes of the kitchen workers more comfortable as they stood on their feet all day. And for my service I was repaid with a few more bits of food. This resourcefulness was critical to my survival and continues to be an important life lesson for me to this day.

From November 1944 until the end of the war in April 1945, I worked in a munitions factory in Elsnig, Germany, near Torgan. Toward the end of April, the Germans knew their defeat was at hand. On April 20, 1945, a train arrived at the factory to be loaded with grenades, but the Germans loaded us, the prisoners, onto the train instead. Once we had boarded, they slammed the doors shut on us. Barbed wire covered the windows. When the train stopped in Potsdam, a suburb of Berlin, the Allies bombed the train, thinking it was loaded with ammunition. The train caught on fire. My dress caught on fire. Several of us jumped out and rolled on the ground to extinguish the flames. Luckily, those of us who were able to jump out were not badly burned. Two days later we were liberated by the Russians. The war was over.

For many prisoners, freedom came as a psychological shock after suffering through all the years of terror and brutality. Some just gave

~ Street Smarts and Common Sense ~

up and died. I never gave up in this way. I was still young and now had the prospect of a whole life ahead of me.

I met up with a girl who had jumped out of the train with me. We ran to a German farm nearby and were given some clothes and food. The next day we looked at each other and said, “Well, what do we do now?” We had nobody and nothing in Germany, so we decided to make our way back to Poland.

She and I joined together with a fellow who had acquired a horse and cart. We fashioned it into a gypsy wagon to hide in at night, and that is how we traveled back to Poland.

I had no family remaining in Poland but eventually learned that I had an uncle and cousin in the United States. They sent affidavits on my behalf that would enable me to go there, but I couldn’t travel directly, so I lived in a DP (displaced persons) camp in Munich, Germany, for one year.



Survivors from Przemyśl, Poland, in German DP camp  
1946

~ Sidonia Lax ~

In 1947, I traveled by ship to the United States of America. Entering through New York Harbor and seeing the Statue of Liberty brought me to tears. As I disembarked from the ship, I literally kissed the ground of the United States. This country represented freedom – a word that was hard to comprehend after all I'd been through.

For me, returning to Poland with the March of the Living each year is not about death and darkness but about life and the triumph of the human spirit. Spending time with the youth delegation on this trip enables me to pass on my knowledge to the next generation. Sharing the tragedy and horrors of my personal experiences allows me to see the vulnerability of a young girl trying to survive by learning to cope with whatever was thrown at her. I had developed an inner strength built on common sense and street smarts. Telling my story with a focus on these attributes helps me to connect with the students. In turn, they share with me concerns about their own life challenges. This connection has opened the door for me to touch and be touched by many lives.



Sidonia Lax  
BJE Los Angeles Delegation-March of the Living  
Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland  
2012

Story written by Jan Berlfein Burns  
as told by Sidonia Lax



~ Sidonia Lax ~

In Memory of the  
Sidonia Lewin (Lax) Family

Cyla Liebshard Lewin ל"ד – mother

Isaac Lewin ל"ד – father

and more than twenty aunts, uncles, and cousins who died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide



Liebshard Family Wedding  
Vienna, Austria  
circa 1932

~ Street Smarts and Common Sense ~

## Survivors

Sidonia Lewin Lax and Lewis Lax ז"ל  
Artek Engelhart ז"ל – uncle

## The Next Generation

CHILDREN  
(and spouses)

Genie and Gary Benson  
Irene and Yoni Boujo  
Lynda and Bernard Lax

GRANDCHILDREN  
(and spouse)

David and Jen Benson  
Andrew Benson  
Eric Boujo  
Joey Boujo  
Taylor Lax

## GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN

Oliver Benson  
Tyler Benson



The Lax Family

## Paula Lebovics' Story



Pesa Balter (Paula Lebovics) (fourth from left)  
upon liberation from Auschwitz  
January 1945



## ~ NINE YEARS OLD ~

I was born Pesa Balter on September 25, 1933, in Ostrowiec Kielecki, Poland. My recollections of my family before and during the war years are seen through the eyes of a child.



Grandfather's building on Aleja 3 Maja  
Ostrowiec, Poland

I lived with my parents, Israel and Perla Leah, and five siblings, Herschel, Jonathan, Chaya, Chana, and Josef. Our house was in a courtyard behind a large building owned by my grandfather Akiva Rosset. He was a well-to-do businessman in the liquor, forestry, and shoe and leather business. He built

houses for all of his children within this courtyard. As a child, I was surrounded by family, other children, and lots of activity. Everyone in our family worked for my grandfather. My mother worked in the family shoe store housed in his building. The building still stands on Aleja 3 Maja in Ostrowiec today.

I was the baby of the family and about to celebrate my sixth birthday when the Germans took over our town. I was nine when they began rounding up the Jews. Those who were "chosen" during the first selection would be transported to Treblinka for immediate extermination, although we didn't know that at the time. My uncle Natan Rosset and my eldest brother, Herschel, dug a hole under a shed where our family and extended family, about forty-four people altogether, hid underground. We only had enough food for one day, thinking that the selection process would last that long, but it went on for three or four days. Herschel told us he would let us know when

~ Paula Lebovics ~

it was safe to come out. From inside, I peered through the cracks to the roadway above, where the Germans were marching women and children for deportation to the town square. I saw women begging to be killed in place of their children, while soldiers ripped the children from their mothers' arms and shot them and left them on the road.

After hiding for three days, Herschel told Chaya and Chana that they could come out because he thought their work papers would assure their safety. Their work papers did not save them. I was nine years old when Chaya and Chana were taken to Treblinka, where the Nazis would murder them. When my brother found out what had happened to my sisters, he lied to my mother to spare her grief. And though I was just nine, I knew what had happened to my sisters.

During the second selection, which took place in the winter, I was again put into hiding, this time with my mother and brother Josef. When it was over, we were brought back into the ghetto. I saw patches of pink snow on the ground and was keenly aware of what had caused the snow to turn pink.

A labor camp was built outside the ghetto, surrounded by ditches and enclosed with a barbed wire fence. The Germans wanted to empty the ghetto and reassign everyone to the labor camp as their slave laborers. My parents were taken to the labor camp, but I was too young to work, so I escaped with the help of Josef, who was only fourteen. The two of us went into hiding again, this time in a brick factory on a big compound just outside the ghetto. We would hide in one place during the day (sometimes with other children) and another place at night. Once we hid in a big iron vat until my feet began to swell. Another time we moved to a place overrun with rats. My brother left me there and decided to go out and find work in the labor camp. I remember deserting the rat-infested hiding place and walking out into broad daylight. I thought I too could find work.

~ Nine Years Old ~

But I was caught by a Ukrainian guard who grabbed me, tied my hands together, and walked me to the gate of the brick factory where an SS guard was in charge. A group of women were gathered near the gate waiting to go back to the labor camp. I saw my mother with them and tried to run to her. Although the women attempted to hide me, the SS guard pulled me out by the hand and threw me up against a wall. I must have passed out, because when I came to, everyone was gone except for the German SS guard. He was looking for other children who may have been hiding in the brick factory, and he wanted me to show him where they were. I told him I didn't know where any children were hiding. I had the nerve to ask if he didn't find other children would he please let me see my parents one last time. In my mind he agreed to this. After a futile search for children in the factory, he took me to the wall. But instead of letting me go, he pulled out his gun, held it to my head, and yelled for me to turn around. In a brave act of defiance I refused to turn around for him. I wanted him to keep his promise. At that very moment, he was distracted by laughter from a drunken comrade walking by. The soldier said to the SS guard (in German, though I understood because I spoke Yiddish), "Don't waste a bullet on her. She'll soon be dead anyway." By some miracle the SS guard released me and I walked to the labor camp to become a worker.

After one and a half years, the camp was liquidated and all the workers were loaded into cattle wagons and transported to Auschwitz. I was ten and a half years old when I arrived there. I survived the next six months of my Auschwitz prison term partly by being moved somewhat arbitrarily from one block (or barrack) to another. Originally I was sent to the women's block. From there some other kids and I were sent to a Kinder block. The kids not selected were sent to the gas chambers. From the Kinder block I was picked to go to a different Kinder block where we learned German, Polish, and Czech songs and dances to perform as a "Show and Tell" propaganda event

~ Paula Lebovics ~

for the visiting Red Cross observers. We were given proper clothes and slept in a decent barrack, and I didn't have to report to the daily appell (roll call) and stand shivering in the cold for hours while our numbers were called and counted.

But then the nice clothes were taken away, and I was moved to Dr. Mengele's Kinder experimentation block, where I stayed invisible by playing a game with myself to see how long I could get by unnoticed. Because of my game I never encountered Mengele. Who knows how long I would have survived in his Kinder block had the Russians not finally liberated us? When the Russians liberated Auschwitz on January 27, 1945, I was among a handful of children who survived because we got left behind when the Nazis emptied the camps, sending their captives onto the Death March. Miraculously, my mother survived, too. She was also left behind and we were reunited in Auschwitz a few days after liberation.

Shortly after the war, my mother and I reunited with my brothers,



Holocaust survivors return to Ostrowiec, Poland  
Pesa Balter (Paula Lebovics) (front center)-1945

Herschel and Josef. Herschel quickly recognized that Russian-occupied Poland was equally unwelcoming to Jewish refugees. Once again he risked his life to smuggle us, one at a time, into the American zone in Germany. My mother, Josef, and I settled in a Displaced Persons camp in Föhrenwald, Germany.

In spring 1947 Josef left with the illegal aliyah to Palestine and was detained in Cyprus. He ended up in Haifa at the end of 1947, served in the Israeli Navy for twenty-five years, and fought all its wars.

~ Nine Years Old ~

For six years my mother and I remained in the DP camp before coming to the United States. Herschel moved to Australia after the war, where at the age of ninety-four he continues to live today. As a rabbinical student, Jonathan had escaped from Poland and spent the war years in Palestine. I married Michael Lebovics in Detroit, Michigan, in 1957. Our daughter, Linda Pearl, was born in 1958 and our son, Dan, was born in 1960.

I am now eighty years old. I travel back to Poland each year with the BJE March of the Living Los Angeles delegation of teens to share my stories with them and to impress upon them that the Holocaust is not a myth and should never become one. I pay tribute to the memory of my sisters, Chaya and Chana, when we visit the Treblinka Memorial. Standing before the granite boulder, which represents our town of Ostrowiec, I say Kaddish for my sisters, surrounded by love from the young people of our delegation. In Auschwitz-Birkenau I



Paula Lebovics in Treblinka with March of the Living delegates  
saying Kaddish for sisters, Chaya and Chana  
2008

also say Kaddish for my father, who was taken to the gas chamber there on September, 11th, 1944, the second day of Rosh Hashanah. He never abandoned his religious belief.

I attribute my survival of the Holocaust to several things: chance,

~ Paula Lebovics ~

luck, and aspects of my own character and initiative. Even though I was very young, I acquired animal instincts and was able to use them to my advantage. As with animal camouflage, I recognized the value of being able to make myself invisible within my environment, and I consciously did this to keep from being singled out when such a minor act could mean the difference between life and death in the blink of an eye. I was both so strong and so weak. In those days, nothing made any sense, and logical judgments didn't necessarily lead to logical results. So I certainly played a part in my own survival, yet it is hard to deny that I would not be here today were it not for unaccountable moments of sheer miracles and the help of my brother Herschel, who saved my life countless times.



Herschel and Pesa Balter  
(Paula Lebovics)

Story written by Jan Berlfein Burns  
as told by Paula Lebovics



~ Paula Lebovics ~

## In Memory of the Pesa Balter (Paula Lebovics) Family

Chaya Balter ח"י – sister

Chana Balter ח"י – sister

Israel Balter ח"י – father

Sara Rosset ח"י – grandmother

and many more aunts, uncles, and cousins who died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide



Balter Family  
Josef, Perla, Herschel, Chana, Chaya,  
Pesa Balter (Paula Lebovics), Israel  
Ostrowiec, Poland  
1940



~ Nine Years Old ~

## Survivors

Paula Balter Lebovics and Michael Lebovics ל"ז

Perla Rosset Balter ל"ז – mother

Herschel Balter – brother

Jonathan Balter ל"ז – brother

Josef Balter ל"ז – brother

## The Next Generation

### CHILDREN

Linda Pearl Lebovics

Dan Lebovics



Lebovics Family

## Gabriella Karin's Story



Gabriella Foldes (Karin)  
Bratislava, Slovakia  
1941

## ~ A CHILDHOOD IN HIDING ~

I was born in Czechoslovakia in the city of Bratislava on November 17, 1930. My father, Arpad Al Foldes, and my mother, Sari Kulka, owned a delicatessen store next to the main police station. The policemen frequented our store, usually ordering takeout sandwiches and wine.

In 1939 when the war began, Czechoslovakia was divided. The region we lived in became Slovakia, and Bratislava its capital. I was an only child. My maternal grandmother, Franciska Kulka, always lived with us. At that time we moved from our nice apartment to the warehouse in the back of my father's store. The warehouse was just a big room with one sink, which we used to wash both the dishes and ourselves. We put a stove in the corner of the room and we were all set. The warehouse had two doors, one leading to the toilet and the other into the store. My parents reasoned that if we weren't living in a nice place and didn't have good furniture, nobody would bother us. We lived in the warehouse for a little over four years, though I was not there all the time.



Arpad Al, Gaby (Gabriella Karin), and Sari Foldes  
in front of family store

To further protect me from the Nazis, my aunt Elena Binderova (my mother's oldest sister) legally adopted me. My aunt was a childless

~ Gabriella Karin ~

widow and loved me as her own daughter. Her deceased husband was a Gentile. This allowed her to be exempted from being labeled as a Jew. As her daughter, I too became exempt from wearing the “Star of David” identifying me as a Jew. And I now also possessed papers with which I was permitted to attend a convent school. The first year I boarded at the school and slept in a huge room with twenty other girls. I went to church every day and learned everything about the Christian religion. The nuns unofficially knew I was Jewish, but they were good to me. Two other Jewish girls, sisters, also attended the convent school.

I was very unhappy at school because I always worried about what was happening to my parents. I wondered if they were still living in the warehouse or had been taken away. I cried constantly and was close to having a nervous breakdown. On doctor’s advice, my parents decided to bring me home and have me attend the convent as a day school rather than as a boarder. In retrospect, that saved my life.

My mother was active in the underground. With her connections in the police department, she received lists of names of people who were to be picked up on a certain night. She passed along the list to the Jewish underground organization. She also personally went to warn the families listed and recommended that they go into hiding. She took me along with her many times as a decoy. It was terrible to watch people get this news. Some started packing and crying, giving up hope, not having the strength to fight any more. Some went into hiding, while others joined the partisan fighters who were hiding in the forest, waiting for the right moment to strike.

One day my mother found out that the Germans were going to ring the bell of every residence, looking for Jews. If they found any, the whole family would have to leave with the Nazis at once. No one stood a chance unless they went into hiding. Nobody was spared –

~ A Childhood in Hiding ~

old people, babies, the sick, pregnant women – all were forced to join the “March of Death.”

We were sitting in our warehouse room, all packed, ready to go, certain this would be our last night at home. Suddenly, there was a loud knocking at our warehouse door. We opened it to see a group of Germans standing there, but they didn’t enter. Each of them looked inside. We were frightened stiff. Without asking us for papers or anything, they left. We couldn’t believe it. After a few minutes the manager of the building (who was a policeman) appeared and explained what had happened. He said that the Germans had asked him if there were any Jews in this place. He had answered that there was only one family, but they were born Christians. The Germans wanted to see us. They looked and left. The manager asked my mother, “Did I answer good?”

“You couldn’t have said it any better,” she replied. We couldn’t believe that the Germans accepted his word without any proof.



Franciska Kulka and Gaby Foldes  
(Gabriella Karin)

My grandmother still lived with us then. She did all the cooking and took care of me. I loved her dearly. She taught me how to sew, knit, and do all kinds of handiwork. She was a marvelous person, always cheerful and kind. “Starenka,” as I called her, attracted people with her charm. As the city was being constantly bombed, many Gentile families moved out to live in neighboring villages where it was safer, far from the industrial areas. One sympathetic Gentile family, the Blanars, took my grandmother in with them. They pretended she was their mother. She lived with them in the country village Malzenice for one

~ Gabriella Karin ~

year before dying of cancer. A religious Jewish woman, she is buried in a Christian cemetery there.

When my grandmother lived in Malzenice from 1942 to 1943, I visited her many times. I made friends with local peasant girls. Those were some of the happier times of my childhood, but one day a frightening thing happened. I was working in the fields with my friends when just over our heads we saw a British airplane in a dogfight with a Slovak plane. The British plane was shot down. As it fell burning from the sky, we were afraid that it would land on us. We ran and hid in the bushes, scared to death and afraid to move. We were also afraid that the Slovak pilots might think we were the survivors from the enemy plane and shoot us. Only after the plane exploded and burned up did we venture from our hiding place physically unharmed.

The town of Malzenice is located about forty miles from Bratislava. During one of my visits to my grandmother, I got sick and was afraid to go back to the city by train. My uncle Sandor came from the city to get me on a bicycle. We rode back to Bratislava on country roads to avoid being caught. My uncle was a brave man. When we arrived back in Bratislava and started to walk, a drunken German grabbed me. My uncle pulled me out of the German's arms and we ran into the crowded street. The German was too drunk to follow and we were able to get lost in the crowd.

The air raids continued on a daily basis. Each day was filled with horror, bad news, and our constant effort to obtain "official" protection papers. We would acquire one paper only to find that we now needed another one. It was a nerve-wracking situation. My mother got some false papers stating that her father was not a Jew. Her father had died when she was four years old. It was easier to falsify papers of someone no longer living, changing the deceased from a Jew into a Gentile, than to falsify papers of a living person.

## ~ A Childhood in Hiding ~

These papers also helped save the lives of my mother's two brothers, my uncles Sandor and Miki.

Once the Germans occupied Slovakia in 1944, we knew there would be no escaping. By this time we had heard terrible news about gas chambers. We understood that the concentration camps were not real labor camps, which is what the Germans had wanted us to believe.

Karol Blonar was my aunt's boyfriend and the son of the Gentile couple who hid my grandmother in the countryside. When we had nowhere else to go, he took us in and hid eight of us (my mother, father, and me, my aunt, two uncles, and a married couple who were friends of my parents) in his apartment in a building called "Slovenska Liga" in the center of the city. At first, my father would leave the apartment to go to work in our store, which we now no longer owned. However, after a few days we found a piece of paper under our door, warning us that the Germans were looking for us and not to go outdoors. The wife of our policeman friend had delivered a message to Karol not knowing we were hiding inside his apartment. She was hopeful that he knew where we were and would be able to warn us that the Germans were rounding up Jews. On that night 15,000 Jewish people were rounded up and taken to concentration camps. From that day on, for the next nine months, we did not leave our hiding place in the apartment. We couldn't even open the curtains or windows to look out. But being thirteen and curious, I peeked out through the curtained window to see what was going on. The apartment was across the street from the Nazi-Slovak headquarters. Looking out through my peephole, I saw the two sisters who were with me in the convent running on the street, trying to hide, but they were caught by the Nazis and dragged into the Nazi-Slovak headquarters. Had I continued as a boarding student at the convent school, I probably would have been with those girls and caught, too. From the window, I saw many other people caught by the Nazis. These were terrible,

~ Gabriella Karin ~

unforgettable sights.

I can't tell you how oppressive and confining it was to never be able to go outdoors. We were always afraid that if we were discovered we would be killed. We had to whisper all the time so people in the building would not hear us. The building was a big apartment and office complex five stories high. Only Gentiles were allowed to live there. This was the rule even before the war. For this reason, when Germans raided the whole city, house-by-house, and apartment-by-apartment, they didn't come into this building. After this roundup, only the handful of Jewish people able to hide in the city remained safe. Karol Blonar, being Gentile, could come and go from his apartment. He brought us food, but he couldn't bring too much, so as not to raise suspicion. He brought just enough food for us to survive. He was a journalist and a lawyer and he worked next door to a library. He brought me as many books as I could read – saving my sanity. People on the outside simply didn't know how much a book meant to us, closed up inside for nine months. Reading, learning, and the news were our only diversions and entertainment.

Uncle Miki had been cooped up enough. He decided to caution his friends, to tell them what was going on, but he got caught and was sent to a concentration camp in Slovakia. He showed the authorities the false papers about his father being a Gentile, but they didn't believe that the papers were real and tortured him to get the truth out of him. Suddenly, a German entered the room who recognized my uncle. This particular German was a very poor man and through the years Uncle Miki had helped him financially. When he saw what was happening, he said he knew Miki's father and that he was not Jewish. Uncle Miki wasn't set free, but he was allowed to work in the camp, unlike the other Jews who were loaded onto trains and sent to Auschwitz.



## ~ A Childhood in Hiding ~

My other uncle, Sandor, was with us during the night, but during the day he worked as a waiter at the train station. We needed the money to survive and he believed his false papers would protect him. One day a man recognized him and called the Germans. Uncle Sandor showed his papers, but this was of no interest to them. They took him to the men's room, asked him to pull his pants down, and saw that he was circumcised. Uncle Sandor was sent to a concentration camp, the very camp where his brother, Miki, was. When Miki saw his brother, he went to his German friend and somehow they managed to keep Sandor there as a laborer, too. Both my uncles survived the war.

After about eight months of hiding in the apartment, I got very sick. We did not know what it was at the time, but my parents were very worried about me. An underground doctor, risking his own life, came to see me. His diagnosis was tuberculosis of the lungs. I was fourteen years old, had been imprisoned in the apartment for so long without fresh air or sunshine, and I was undernourished. The doctor said I would not survive for two more months. I was lucky that one month later the war was over. Thankfully, I healed well and have never had a recurrence.

In the last days before the Russians came and saved us from the horrors of the Germans, we were still in our hiding place when the constant bombing began. They called it "Carpet Bombing." Day and night, every street and house was hit within a five-mile-square district. As the Germans ran away, some of the soldiers were hit by the bombs. I can still hear their desperate screams. We were there in the middle of it all, still hiding on the third floor of the apartment building. I asked my father if we should go down into the cellar, thinking it would be safer. He answered, "We will go down at the very last minute."

~ Gabriella Karin ~

I asked him, “How do you know when the last minute is?”

“I know,” he answered. Suddenly, after seven days of constant bombing, he shouted, “Let’s go down now!”

All of us started to run downstairs. My father was the last one to cross the room, when a bomb fell on the roof of the neighbor’s house. Shrapnel flew through the window, barely missing my father by just three feet. He knew this was the last minute! In the meantime, I was on the stairway thrown from one side of the wall to another, from the pressure of the bomb. We arrived in the cellar safely, but all shaken up. People who were already there were seeing us for the first time. They couldn’t believe we had been living there in that building without knowing us. We did not tell them we were Jews who had been hiding, fearing that the Germans could still come back.

Finally the Elite Russian army entered the city. They were wonderful young men who gave their lives to free us. Unfortunately, this first brigade was followed by a Russian mob, drinking, looting, and raping women, young or old, it didn’t matter. After all we had been through, it was unbelievable what was going on now. We stayed for a while in the cellar, just to be together with other people, not that it would hold the mob back from raping us, with guns in their hands. When we finally went upstairs, two young soldiers appeared. They were not drunk, but they constantly leered at me. My father said I was only ten years old, though they didn’t really believe it. We gave them a kerosene lamp as a gift because there wasn’t any electricity, but they would not leave. Fortunately, my uncles, Sandor and Miki, arrived just at this time. They had walked about twenty-five miles from the labor camp where they had been imprisoned. Seeing the situation, Uncle Sandor ran downstairs to the cellar and brought up all the men to our place to intimidate the soldiers. It worked. The soldiers left with the kerosene lamp and I was saved from a brutal rape.

~ A Childhood in Hiding ~



Arpad Al and Gaby Foldes  
(Gabriella Karin)

We were freed on the evening before my father's birthday: April 4, 1945.

The war had ended, but life was not normal from one day to the next. We returned to my father's store to see what remained. The store was empty. The Russians had taken everything. Before we went into hiding, my father had put 10,000 kronas in an envelope, fastened with a pushpin to the back of one of the store shelves. Although there was nothing left in the store, he reached to the back of the shelf where he remembered hiding the money. To our great surprise there was the envelope with all the money!

Every day we went to the railroad station to see if we saw any familiar faces among those returning from the concentration camps. It was hard to recognize people. Everyone who emerged from the train looked alike. They were a group of skeletons, hardly able to stand on their own feet. I was overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness. The tragedy and terror of the recent past had marked their faces. I was searching for signs of hope, but saw only desperation in their eyes. The people arriving did not know if others in their family were still alive. After having gone through and surviving a living hell, they knew there was just a slim chance of being reunited with their families. I wondered how long it would take them to feel human again. These feelings stayed with me a long time and I worried I would have them forever.

I wasn't able to control my dreams. For years I dreamed the same

~ Gabriella Karin ~

thing. I would be sitting on a suitcase, going somewhere I didn't want to go. Then there would be a fire and I couldn't get away. I would run and scream to no avail.

Though I couldn't control my dreams, I decided I still could control my waking hours and I didn't want to live all my waking hours in fear. I reasoned that there will always be something to be afraid of and if I gave in to the fears that had been implanted into my soul by the Nazis, then the Nazis would have won. I didn't want to live the rest of my life that way. Hitler did not get my body, and I would not let him get my soul. I couldn't grieve forever and I wouldn't let the Nazis win in this way.



Gabriella Foldes Karin

I had been a good student, when I could attend school. In hiding for nine months, I'd spent so much time reading that I'd learned a lot. When the war was over I took an achievement test. I did not have to repeat any grades. I was accepted at a prestigious three-year school where I obtained my license for opening a business. I studied designing, patternmaking, and business administration. There were only two schools in Europe like this, one in Bratislava and the other in Zurich, Switzerland. The school was on a college level and I was the youngest student. All my schoolmates were eighteen years and older.

~ A Childhood in Hiding ~

I was just fifteen, yet in spite of the time I had missed at school, I still fit in. I was a very serious student and eager to learn. At graduation time I got a special commendation for a “job well done.”

By nature I have always smiled and presented a happy face to the world. In spite of all my wartime experiences, I consciously decided to move forward with a positive attitude toward life. I now see each new day as a gift.

Story written by Gabriella Karin

~ Gabriella Karin ~

In Memory of the  
Gabriella Foldes (Karin) Family

Pavla Silbering Foldes ל"ט – grandmother

and seventy-five cousins, uncles, and aunts who died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide



Foldes Family  
Trstena, Czechoslovakia  
1921

~ A Childhood in Hiding ~

## Survivors

Gabriella Foldes Karin and Ofer Fred (Lederer) Karin ל"ד

Arpad Al Foldes ל"ד – father

Sari Charlotte Kulka Foldes ל"ד – mother

## The Next Generation

CHILDREN  
(and spouse)

Rom R. Karin and Mardi Ross Karin

## GRANDCHILDREN

Todd Albert Karin

Benjamin Ross Karin

Evelyn Charlotte Karin



Karin Family

## Emil Jacoby's Story



Emil Jakubovics (Jacoby)  
Ungvár, Hungary  
1943



## ~ RESCUE IN EUROPE ~

Fortunately for me, I never saw the inside of a concentration camp or a labor camp. Rather, as a member of a Zionist organization and the resistance movement, I forged documents creating false identities for Jews trying to hide or escape and later helped to establish escape routes out of Hungary and into Romania for those who were seeking a path to Palestine. (Jews referred to Eretz Yisrael as Palestine prior to the establishment of the state of Israel. The term is used here historically, not politically.)

When the war was over, the survivors wanted to return to their homes in Hungary. They were mostly young people who had lost much of their families or were now orphans. Because of the network of connections I'd established in the resistance movement, I was in a position to help. Many of these survivors would go on to live productive lives, raising families and contributing to the leadership of Jewish communities in Israel and around the world.

One day, over seventy years ago, I was standing in the Budapest train station. It was the spring of 1944. I held a newspaper up to shield a portion of my face. This was the sign to identify myself as a member of the resistance. I was looking for my other contacts, as we would be traveling on the train together but sitting separately. Our mission was to establish an escape route out of Hungary and over the border into Romania. I was just 20 years old, idealistic, unafraid, and deeply committed to the future of the Jewish people.

I was born Menachem (Mendel in Yiddish and Emil in Hungarian) Jakubovics, on November 30, 1923, in Cop, Czechoslovakia. It was a small town just across the border from Hungary. My parents, Benjamin and Rivka Jakubovics, had six children, three boys and three girls. I was the second child and their eldest son.

~ Emil Jacoby ~

Growing up as a young boy in Cop, I experienced no anti-Semitism. Czechoslovakia was a democracy, and the population of our village was made up mostly of Hungarians. By the time I was six years old, I already spoke three languages – Hungarian with my mother, Yiddish with my father, and Slovak with the children at school. Our home was full of the beauty and richness of Jewish life. The traditions of learning and study were passed on to me from an early age.

The security and comfort of our home life abruptly changed the month I turned fifteen, in November 1938, when Hungary occupied southern Slovakia and our town of Cop fell to the Hungarian side of the border. Without proof of Hungarian citizenship, we were no longer welcome in our own town. Because my father was not Hungarian, we now faced deportation.

It was not long before the Hungarian police showed up at our door, intent on escorting us out of the country. As night fell, we were herded together, my parents and brothers and sisters and I, into two taxis. The taxis drove to the new border and deposited us on the other side. From there we split up. My parents took my younger brother and sisters and somehow found their way to my grandparents' house in Velykyi Bereznyi. My brother Zvi and I wandered for some time in the dark before a Slovak policeman directed us to the Jewish quarter in Michalovce, where our aunt and uncle lived. Six months later, our entire family was able to reunite and return to our home in Cop. My parents then decided that I should go to Uzhhorod, Hungary (then Ungvár), to attend the Orthodox yeshiva in that city.

In 1939 – the start of World War II – our life in Hungary had not yet been dramatically affected, because Hungary was allied with Germany. Yes, there were anti-Jewish laws, but we weren't living under occupying forces. We went about our daily lives with the

~ Rescue in Europe ~

underlying fear of being deported to the labor camps. But as bad as that threat seemed, labor camps were not extermination camps, so we didn't fear for our lives, and most important for me, I was able to carry on with my education.

I loved the yeshiva and was an excellent student. Outside of school I made friends with some young people who had taken an interest in Zionism. Together we joined a group called Bnei Akiva, an illegal, religious Zionist organization. These new friends were engaged in learning about the events taking place all around us. Because of the horrible stories coming out of the rest of Europe, they saw the need for Jews to insure their future by having a safe home of their own.



Outing of girls and boys in Bnei Akiva (Emil Jakubovics (Jacoby) top right)  
Hungary  
1943

~ Emil Jacoby ~

The more involved I got with my friends in Bnei Akiva, the more I learned about Zionism and the need to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. I struggled to reconcile my religious studies at the yeshiva with my growing interest in political activism. Ultimately, I made a decision at the age of sixteen to leave the yeshiva and transfer to the Gymnasium – the modern Jewish high school in Uzhhorod. I made this decision without the consent of my parents, but I knew the Gymnasium would give me a more worldly and comprehensive Jewish education than the yeshiva could. Beyond that, I even changed my name to Uziel (Uzi), after Rav Ben-Zion Uziel, the Sephardic chief rabbi of Palestine.



Yitzhak Schweizer and  
Emil Jakubovics (Jacoby)  
Ungvár, Hungary  
1943

I continued my high school studies at the Gymnasium and furthered my involvement with Bnei Akiva as war raged on in Europe. Our Zionist group sought to broaden our base by making connections with others who had similar interests in the larger urban environment of Budapest. In many ways, we were just teenagers wanting to have fun together, but we were also idealistic about Palestine. We thought the war would soon be over and that we could help prepare for a Jewish return to Palestine, but our real rescue work had yet to begin.

By the time I graduated from high school in 1943, the Allies were winning the war. Again, we thought the war would end soon. Rather than return to my family in Cop, I decided to go to Budapest and commit myself to the work of Bnei Akiva and the future of the Jewish people.

Our movement had been revived by an influx of refugees who'd escaped by crossing the Slovakian border into Hungary. Filled with

~ Rescue in Europe ~

tales of the horrific events taking place across Europe, these young people, many our age, sought refuge in Palestine. They became our role models, providing us with crucial information that enabled us to intensify our work and take the efforts of our organization more seriously. In the fall of 1943, I was elected to the top leadership of Bnei Akiva.



Leaders of Bnei Akiva in Hungary  
Emil Jakubovics (Jacoby) (bottom right)  
Ungvár, Hungary  
1943

With our mission emboldened, we went out to the countryside, to villages and ghettos, to encourage young people to prepare for a move to Palestine after the war. In March 1944, on one of these organizing trips, I made a detour to visit my family in Cop for Shabbos. The emotional weekend was fraught with the uncertainties of war and the stories we'd heard from the refugees passing through our town.

~ Emil Jacoby ~

My weekend ended on a Saturday evening. I made my goodbyes to my mother and brothers and sisters. My father walked me to the train station. The village roads were very dark and still. My father and I walked together in silence. Little did we know that these would be our last moments together. I hold that precious memory of my father, of my family, and of my home close to my heart to this day.

When we arrived at the train station, I discovered all the seats for the express train to Budapest had been sold out, so I purchased a ticket for the local train. It was a twelve-hour journey, with the train stopping at all the small towns between Cop and Budapest. Arriving at an outlying station in Budapest on March 19, 1944, I learned that the Germans had invaded and occupied Hungary on that day. The express train I'd intended to take had been met by the German army at the main train depot that morning. All Jews on the express train had been deported. By a miracle, I was not on that train and my life had been spared.

With Hungary now under siege, my comrades in Bnei Akiva held a conference in Budapest. The young refugees from Slovakia who had experienced living under occupation guided us in establishing some rules for passive resistance to the new occupying forces:

Do not cooperate with the authorities.

Do not wear a yellow star identifying yourself as a Jew (except when beneficial to operations to do so).

Take on a different identity to help survive.

If given the opportunity to walk out of the country – take it. Bear arms

Our movement took on a new purpose, and I was assigned to be in charge of document forgery. I learned to forge false identity papers

~ Rescue in Europe ~

that would give their carriers more freedom to come out of hiding, to work, or to cross borders. I prepared the papers in Budapest, and then my comrades would travel into the countryside to encourage people to take the new documents to save themselves.

Many people thought they would be safer in their small towns and villages, where their families had lived for generations and their neighbors knew them. We, on the other hand, thought that the anonymity of a big city like Budapest would be safer. It was not easy to convince people, even with the help of false identity papers, to leave their towns and venture into the big city. And as it turned out, Budapest was the safer choice, because it was easier to blend in and even become invisible among the large population.

While the forgery process was under way, I was assigned to another major task. We needed to establish escape routes out of Hungary and into Romania, and then from Romania to Palestine via Constanta, a major port on the Black Sea. My job was to establish one of the escape routes out of Hungary and then continue on to Bucharest, Romania, where I would head up rescue operations. Of course, all of these operations were very clandestine.

Standing on that train platform in the Budapest station those seventy years ago, I held a newspaper up to shield a portion of my face, looking for strangers doing the same. I was signaling to all my contacts on the platform. We boarded separately, sat alone, but we were aware of one another as the train left the station. Our escape plans had been set in motion.

Our mission was to take the train to Debrecen, a town near the Romanian border. All I knew was that I would receive further instructions along the way. I carried nothing with me except for my treasured high school diploma, which was carefully folded and

~ Emil Jacoby ~

nestled into the breast pocket of my jacket. I was so proud of this accomplishment that in spite of the uncertainty of the mission, I wanted to keep my diploma with me at all times.

Our train never made it to Debrecen. It was halted outside of the city because the Americans had bombed the central train station earlier that day. All passengers were required to disembark until further notice. Fortunately, our operations leader had identified himself to our group and came up with an alternative plan.

In the town that the train had stopped in, there was a safe house, an apartment that had belonged to a Jewish family. The family had been deported and their apartment had been sealed off. Since it was never taken over by the police, our group began using it as a staging area for its illegal operations.

Our leader told us how to get to the apartment but instructed us to make our way there separately and under the cover of darkness. We succeeded, and after nightfall we found ourselves in the dark and unfamiliar apartment. We spoke to one another in hushed voices. We were strangers, young boys and girls in our teens and twenties, on a common yet dangerous mission.

The questions went back and forth. "What should we do next?" "Should we continue on in our mission or abort it now?" "Should we go back to Budapest?" "Should we stay together or should we split up?" Each person voiced an opinion, another idea, a new concern.

The apartment had adjacent neighbors, and so to not arouse suspicion, we kept our voices to whispers and all the lights off. But suddenly there came a pounding on the door. We all froze. Again, there was a pounding on the door, and flashlights beamed light through the covered windows. By the time the police busted into the apartment,



~ Rescue in Europe ~

I had found my way into a crawl space and managed with one of the other boys to crawl across the attic. It emptied out into an adjoining, vacant apartment. Several others from our group were not so lucky and were arrested by the police. For the moment we were safe but now locked into another sealed apartment. The police continued to look for us. The light beams from their flashlights now scanned across the room where we were hiding. At the same moment that the light exposed us, a cat clattered off a trashcan outside, making a noise that was loud enough to distract the police and send them off to look in another direction – thus saving our lives.

Relieved but still jittery, we found a key inside the apartment so we could let ourselves out. I never learned the fate of my comrades and alone made my way back to Budapest and reported in for my next assignment. Though our mission had been aborted, we learned important lessons for our next attempt to forge escape routes out of Hungary.

Two weeks later, I was sent again to cross the border into Romania. In spite of my near arrest on the first attempt, I don't recall being afraid. Though I was always aware I could be caught at any moment, I didn't know how severe the consequences could be. And as it turned out, I was never caught, I was never questioned, and I never had to show my papers to anyone.

For this next attempt, I was sent to another locale near the border. By now summer was approaching, and the town where I was sent was a resort and tourist destination just a few kilometers from the Romanian border. From the train station, I followed my given instructions to walk the short distance to a designated restaurant. I ordered some food there and checked into the motel that adjoined the restaurant. In the morning I was to meet up with the others who would walk across the border with me. Fortunately, the resort town

~ Emil Jacoby ~

was frequented by vacationing Germans, who weren't particularly suspicious of fellow travelers.

The next morning our little group of strangers walked together to the crossing where our guide signaled for us to continue on without him. He had already been paid for his services. When we heard a dog barking, we feared he was actually delivering us into the hands of the enemy. Unbeknownst to us, the barking dog was the decoy that distracted the border guards as we crossed safely into Romania. This was the second time I was saved by the distracting sounds of an animal.

The Romanian side of the border opened into wide, flat farmland with no place to hide should we need to seek cover. Fortunately that was not necessary, and we made our way to the town of Arad without further incident. Arad was known for giving help and support to refugees passing through. I stayed on for a short time and made other contacts that I would be working with in rescue operations.

My success in getting out of Hungary through the border resort town opened up a good route for other refugees to follow. To continue to help others, I needed to know about what other routes had been set up. For every successful one, there were several unsuccessful ones, and all of this information was crucial to our cause.

When the time came to leave Arad for Bucharest, I traveled by train in disguise. I assumed the character of a Romanian Jew who was being escorted to a labor camp. My escort, also in disguise, was a Romanian Jew posing as my Romanian guard! Our decoy was successful, and once in Bucharest I made contact with the local Zionist organization and was immediately thrust into my new job as the official representative of our religious youth movement.

~ Rescue in Europe ~

Our mission in Bucharest was to get as many refugees out of Romania as we could and send them on their way to Palestine. My job involved securing ahead as many seats as possible on the boats from Constanta. Once I knew how many spaces were available, I had to decide which refugees should go and had to provide the necessary false passports for their journey.



Leaders of Bnei Akiva  
Avigdor Herzog, Emil Jakobovics (Jacoby), Eliezer Grunwald  
Bucharest, Romania  
1944

To acquire multiple passports, I devised a simple plan. Each morning I'd show up at the police station at five o'clock, just as the cleaning woman was unlocking the station doors to begin her day of work. I'd slip her a little money and for that she would let me into the offices to take stacks of blank document papers. I attached the numerous passport photos to the documents and stamped the newly minted passports. Now I was in business and able to successfully continue our rescue work.

In the meantime, the news I had been receiving about my family was unreliable yet disturbing. My parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, and cousins had all been taken to Poland. Most likely this meant that

~ Emil Jacoby ~

they had been deported to a concentration camp, but their true fate was unknown to me at the time. I had to stay focused on my work, though they were never far from my thoughts.

Budapest was liberated by the Russians in January 1945, several months before the official end of World War II, in May. At the end of the war, I received a telegram notifying me that my brother Zvi and two sisters, Malka and Hanna, had survived. That blessed and joyful news, however, was tempered by the realization that my parents, younger siblings, grandparents, and the rest of my extended family had not. The rest of the family had all been gassed in Auschwitz.

When I relive these painful memories of the Holocaust, I recognize that my experience was different from other survivors because I didn't personally suffer the horrors, degradations, physical abuse, and hunger nor was I a prisoner in a labor camp or concentration camp. But my memory still holds great pain for those who were close to me, who did suffer from those atrocities, and for the great loss of so many others in my family.

This experience deepened my commitment to the Jewish people, and my work going forward was an expression of that commitment. Before the war, Bnei Akiva had been working toward the Zionist dream of establishing a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, this dream took on more immediacy. The mission of Bnei Akiva, now a highly organized and well-connected organization, was directed toward helping as many survivors as possible to realize this dream.

And thus began our "March of the Living" at the end of the war.

I took on, in a sense, a leadership role in this "March of the Living." I had the job of helping to bring survivors back to Hungary. Many

~ Rescue in Europe ~

of them were young people without families, homes, or education. Because of the network of connections I had established during my rescue work, I knew many people who shared my desire to build organizations that could support the returning survivors.

During the war, the nations of the world had not helped the Jews to escape from the Nazis. Borders were shut off, and visas were denied. When the war ended, little had changed. Sadly, we were still on our own to find ways to get out of hostile countries and into other foreign lands, where we might be able to start life anew.

Starting in the summer of 1945, and for the two summers that followed, we opened and ran schools and summer camps for these young survivors and encouraged optimism for their future. Anyone with a high school education could be a teacher and anyone with a sixth-grade education could also work with younger children.



Lake Balaton, Hungary  
1945-1947

~ Emil Jacoby ~

Children and teenagers from cities and towns throughout Hungary descended on Lake Balaton for a summer of camping adventures. We spent evenings singing, dancing, and sharing heartfelt conversations around the campfire. Our healing process had begun, and with daily activities designed as fun and games, our campers learned the physical skills necessary to prepare for a move to Palestine.

I was devoted to our cause and ambitious about my own future. While serving as the director of the summer camp near Lake Balaton, I met a junior counselor named Erika Engel, who shared my commitment to our work for our common Jewish future. I soon decided that I wanted her to share a special place in my life. On November 29, 1947, we became engaged. This was the same day I received my doctorate from the University of Budapest and the same day the United Nations voted in favor of establishing the state of Israel. What a momentous and joyous day this was.

We were still so young and idealistic, but there was so much work yet to be done, and this work brought meaning to our lives.



Emil Jakubovics and Erika Engel (Jacoby)  
Budapest, Hungary  
1947

~ Rescue in Europe ~

In August 1949, I traveled to New York City to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary. I received a bachelor's degree in divinity and a master's in Jewish education as well as a master's degree in mathematics from Columbia University's Teachers College.

Erika and I married on September 24, 1950. We have been married for 64 years and have three sons: Jonathan, Benjamin, and Michael.

During the war, my rescue work involved saving the physical lives of Jews. Since the war, my commitment has been to spiritually save and nourish the lives of Jewish souls through Jewish education.



Emil (Uzi) and Erika Jacoby  
Valley Village, California, 2013

In 1953 we moved to Los Angeles, where I took a job at Valley Jewish Community Center, which later became Adat Ari El. I was the director of education there until 1976, when I was appointed associate director and later executive director of the Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE) of Greater Los Angeles. I retired in 2008 and traveled with Erika and the BJE Los Angeles March of the Living delegation to Poland for Holocaust Remembrance Day and to Israel for Israel Independence Day. In my 91st year of life, I am surrounded by love and devotion from Erika, my sons, and their wives, ten beautiful grandchildren, and many great grandchildren.

Story written by Jan Berlfein Burns  
as told by Emil (Uzi) Jacoby

~ Emil Jacoby ~

## In Memory of the Emil Jacoby Family

Benjamin Jakubovics ל"ז – father  
Rivka Aneisz Jakubovics ל"ז – mother  
Shalom Jakubovics ל"ז – brother  
Miriam Jakubovics ל"ז – sister

whose grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide



Rivka Aneisz Jakubovics  
Hungary  
circa 1920



~ Rescue in Europe ~

### Survivors

Emil (Uzi) and Erika Engel Jacoby

Chana Klopott ז"ל – sister

Malka Hershkowitz – sister

Zvi Jakubovits ז"ל – brother

### The Next Generation

#### CHILDREN

(and spouses)

Jonathan and Donna Jacoby

Benjamin and Etta Jacoby

Michael and Cary Jacoby

#### GRANDCHILDREN

Jesse, Joshua, Shalom Tzvi, Shaina, Doovie,  
Yaakov, Simcha, Ariel, Ben, and Yael



Jacoby Family Reunion, 1998

## Halina Wachtel's Story



The image shows a black and white photograph of a young woman, Halina Wachtel, with dark hair, wearing a dark jacket. She is holding a small black card with the number '1566' in white. The photo is mounted on a larger card with a circular stamp above it. To the right of the photo is a table with handwritten information.

1	Herkunftsland	Generalgouvernement
2	Geburtsdag	14. Januar 1923
3	Geburtsort	Lidlece
	Kreis	Lidlece
4	a) Staatsangehörigkeit	staatenlos (Pole)
	b) Volkszugehörigkeit	Pole
5	a) Familienstand led., verh., verw., gesch.	led.
	b) Anzahl der minderjährigen Kinder	

Halina Chromin (Wachtel)  
identification papers for forced labor camp inmates  
Issued December 1942

## ~ MY FALSE IDENTITY ~

The name on my false papers was Halina Chromin. She was a Polish girl born January 14, 1923. I took on her identity to survive the war. These false papers didn't assure my survival, but they were all I had, and I was young and innocent and didn't recognize the danger I was in.



German Reich  
Workers Identification for Foreigners

Before becoming Halina, I was Chayele Szuldenrein, born October 22, 1925, into a large Hasidic family in Warsaw. I had three brothers, Kalman, Symcha, and Meyer, and two sisters, Gutta and Minia. My mother was born Sura Rivka Manne, but I don't remember my father, Chil Szuldenrein, as he died from tuberculosis when I was very young.

The Szuldenrein family had a successful kosher wine business. My mother worked in the family liquor store, where I can still see her today as she stood behind the counter wrapping parcels for customers from a stack of papers on the counter. The local Polish police officer would stop by the store, and my mother would offer him a drink of vodka. For a time, this kept our family in good graces with the authorities. My mother had blonde hair and blue eyes and, as was

~ Halina Wachtel ~

the custom with observant Jews, always wore a wig. She was quite attentive to her appearance. Every Friday she would send my sister and me from the store to her beautician, instructing us to bring back one of her wigs, newly coiffed, for her to wear on Shabbat.

This was my world, and it was very sheltered from whatever existed beyond my extensive family. I went to a Jewish day school for girls. There were over a hundred private Jewish day schools in Warsaw at the time. We spoke both Yiddish and Polish at home. Not all Jews from Poland spoke Polish, but the fact that I did was critical to my survival.

Before the war, my mother would take us every summer to the countryside for fresh air and relaxation. We would go to a resort in Otwock just outside Warsaw and stay in cottages that surrounded a villa. Much of my extended family summered there as well, and in our leisure the young people, my siblings and cousins, would play volleyball while the adults socialized around constant games of cards. My mother got us a subscription to the local library so that we would have access to plenty of books during our summer break from school. We all loved to read, so this was a special treat for us.

We were in the countryside enjoying the family camaraderie when the Germans invaded Poland on September 1st, 1939. Our apartment in Warsaw was bombed, but fortunately it happened during our absence and only the kitchen was damaged. The rest of the apartment was unharmed, so we managed this way for some time. Eventually, it became more and more difficult to manage daily life because we had no food. My mother in her desperation arranged for someone she knew in Wegrow, a small town outside Warsaw, to take in my sister, two brothers, and me, so that we could escape from what had become the Warsaw ghetto. My eldest brother, Kalman, and sister Gutta were to remain behind in Warsaw with our mother.

~ My False Identity ~

The first time I escaped from the ghetto was through the Jewish cemetery. Minia, Symcha, Meyer, and I ran through the cemetery and climbed over the outer fence. On the other side we were chased by Polish children who yelled “Jews” at us until we disappeared. We made our way to Wegrow, and I stayed there until Minia sent me back home because I had head lice and she didn’t want to deal with me anymore.



Warsaw Jewish Cemetery - Warsaw, Poland

Back in the ghetto, things had really deteriorated. The Nazis were closing in on us. Each day six thousand people were transported from the ghetto to their death in Treblinka; however, we didn’t know this at the time. We only knew that people were being taken away and the ghetto was being emptied out. Our lives had no meaning to the Nazis. My cousin was shot for wanting a piece of bread. And yet escaping wasn’t as easy as it had been the first time. Now I couldn’t just jump over the cemetery wall.

My second escape came after the Germans had started the roundups, transporting people out of the ghetto and sending them directly to the extermination camp at Treblinka. My cousin (we called her “Big

~ Halina Wachtel ~

Minia” because she had the same name as my sister but was older) was determined to get out of the ghetto before being rounded up like the others. A combination of nerve, stupidity, and chutzpah must have compelled her to put a black veil over her head as though she was a Catholic girl in mourning. Then she and I walked together to the main gate that led out of the ghetto. As we approached, Big Minia picked up a scrap of paper and wrapped some zlotys (money) into it. Stationed at the ghetto gate were three different guards, the Jewish police, the Polish police, and the German police. From beneath her veil, Big Minia handed the piece of paper to the first line of defense, the Jewish police officer. He took the scrap with the money in it, made it seem as if it was a permit, and, risking his own life for ours, signaled to the other policemen to let us pass. We walked out of the gate without showing anything to the other policemen. Our lives were saved by this miracle.

Back in the little town of Wegrow, the roundup of Jews had begun there as well. Somehow my sister Minia was able to buy us false papers from a farmer who forged birth certificates with Polish identities. This is how I came to be Halina Chromin, a teenage Polish girl. I didn’t look stereotypically Jewish, and I spoke Polish (many Jews from shtetls only spoke Yiddish), which helped me pass for Polish. Even with the papers, it was now too dangerous for us to stay in this town, so Minia, our girlfriends Danusia and Maryla, and I returned to Warsaw.

We really didn’t know what else to do. We were four young girls with false papers. We knew so little about the outside world. Even within the Hasidic community of Warsaw, we had mostly only mingled with our own family. We had nowhere to live, so we got a room in a hotel. But the police soon raided the hotel and took us to the police station. The authorities took one look at the four of us and thought we were prostitutes. I guess that accusation was better than the truth. In fact,

~ My False Identity ~

we were naive Hasidic Jewish girls with false papers who'd escaped from the Warsaw ghetto. Luckily the policeman took pity on us. We confided in him and asked him what we should do. He told us it would be safer if we split up, turned ourselves in, and volunteered to go to a labor camp.

My sister Minia stayed in Warsaw and got work as a maid. But the Germans needed all the labor they could get for the war production, so Danusia and I with our false papers got shipped off to Germany, where I was issued German identity papers as an immigrant worker under the name of Halina Chromin.

Living as a young Polish Catholic girl, I worked in a labor camp factory in Gera, Germany. The factory paid room and board, though we were sixteen girls in one room and the allotted food barely kept us from starvation. Some of the girls worked in a marmalade factory. They would smuggle marmalade back to the camp in their undergarments and sometimes share it with me. This little bit of sweetness was the greatest treat in the whole wide world.



Halina Chromin (Wachtel) (third from left), Danusia (Lili Holland) (first from left),  
and other girls from labor camp

On Sundays we didn't work in the factory and were allowed to go into town. From the token money I earned, I could occasionally buy myself a little something like a scarf. The local German beer hall

~ Halina Wachtel ~

served free potato salad to its patrons. If my friends and I covered up the “P” for “Polish” on our armbands, we could get in. Another time, Danusia and I hid our armbands and snuck into the movie house to see a movie. The police discovered us and took us back to camp. The camp director questioned us as to why we had snuck into the movie house. Danusia, acting as translator, asked me what to tell her. I said, “Tell her whatever you want!” For this, we lost our town privileges and were confined to the camp on Sundays.

Since I was posing as a Catholic girl, I was always terrified that if anyone asked me about religion I’d be a “dead duck.” I knew nothing about religious practices other than those relating to Judaism. Of the sixteen girls in our room, I suspected that five others were also Jewish. After the war, I became friends with them but during our time in the labor camp we never acknowledged our Jewishness to one another – we just knew.

After liberation I learned for the first time about concentration camps and extermination camps. I knew nothing about this during the years I worked in the labor camp. When my sister Minia and I were reunited after the war, we learned that we were the only survivors of our immediate family. I have no idea what happened to the rest of my family. They were very gentle people and lived and died by a Christian rule, “When hit, turn the other cheek.” That is why they weren’t able to help themselves and I imagine they went like sheep to the slaughter. They were probably murdered in Treblinka, but to this day I am not certain. I saw myself as kind of a rebel within my family. Did this help me survive? Perhaps in some small way it did. Nothing really made any sense during those times.

I never shared these wartime stories with my own children. In America, the tragedies of my family made me feel different from the American families around us. I didn’t want my children burdened by



~ My False Identity ~

my painful memories or to feel different from their friends because of what had happened to me. So for many years I never spoke of it.



Halina Wachtel  
BJE Los Angeles Delegation  
March of the Living  
Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland  
2012

Now I travel back to Poland with BJE March of the Living and the young people from Los Angeles to share the stories about my wartime experiences. I am rewarded over and over by their curiosity, their compassion, and their genuine desire to learn about me, my family, and all the other survivors who travel with us. They keep me young!

Story written by Jan Berlfein Burns  
as told by Halina Wachtel

~ Halina Wachtel ~

In Memory of the  
Chayele Szuldenrein (Halina Wachtel) Family

Sura Rivka Manne ל"ט – mother

Guta Szuldenrein ל"ט – sister

Kalman Szuldenrein ל"ט – brother

Simcha Szuldenrein ל"ט – brother

Meyer Szuldenrein ל"ט – brother

and many more aunts, uncles, and cousins who died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide

~ My False Identity ~

### Survivors

Halina Szuldenrein Wachtel and Max Wachtel 7"7

Minia Szuldenrein Lederman – sister

### The Next Generation

#### CHILDREN

Arthur Wachtel

Suzette Wachtel



Wachtel Family

## Jack Adler's Story



Ruins of gas chamber in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland

## **~DID ANYONE HOLD HER HAND? ~**

It had been three years since the dark cloud of the Nazi Occupation had turned our town of Pabianice, Poland, a once thriving Jewish community, into a ghetto of starving souls. My mother, Fella, and older brother Chaim were already victims of the Nazis, not by gas chambers, gunshots, or fatal beatings as so many others, but by disease and malnutrition nonetheless.

Before the Nazi occupation in September 1939, my grandfather and most of his ten children including my father worked in the textile industry in Pabianice and Lodz. Lodz was a streetcar ride away from our town, and my father traveled there daily to work, returning home with fresh-cut kosher salami to be relished by my siblings and me.

As a ten-year-old, my world was filled with wonder, and much of that wonder existed outside of the school classroom. I often played hooky from school and found adventure climbing trees in my grandfather's apple and cherry orchard behind the apartment building where we lived.

I was the third child in a family of four, born on February 1, 1929, and named Yacob Szlamek Adler. Chaim Usher, the eldest and my only brother, was a very religious and giving person. He would bring poor Yeshiva students home to have lunch and dinner with our family. I remember my older sister Ester also inviting people to our home. On Saturday afternoons she used to invite girlfriends over to our apartment and they would sing songs together. As a younger brother, perhaps I got underfoot and annoyed them, but the memory of their sweet melodies remains with me today. Peska, our baby sister, was a beautiful, blonde-haired, blue-eyed little girl. Between the four of us, we must have had some typical sibling skirmishes, but that was all part of our close and happy family life before the Nazi occupation of 1939.

~ Jack Adler ~

By May 1942, those of our community who had survived the years of starvation and degradation in the Pabiance ghetto now had to be relocated, as the ghetto was to be liquidated. The German Authority called all inhabitants to report outside their buildings at two o'clock in the afternoon and to move out to the soccer field which had been divided into two sections – the young, the old, and the infirm were to gather in Group A, while the men, boys, and able-bodied girls and women gathered in Group B. My little sister, Peska, was only nine-and-a-half years old, so she, alone, was separated from my father, Cemach, my older sister Ester, and me, who joined Group B.

Imagine the confusion, the fear, and the concern for us all. We had no knowledge of where we were going, why we were being separated, and yet were helpless to do anything about it. But I was in Group B with my father and Ester, while little Peska in the crowd of Group A was alone.

As evening approached, the German authorities began moving people out from Group A, loading them onto trucks and taking them away. Some officers came over to the Group B side and asked for volunteers to walk through the area being vacated by the others. They wanted things to be cleaned up off the ground, all that had been left behind – clothes, papers, and blankets. Bravely, I volunteered, thinking this might give me a chance to find Peska if she was still among those who remained from Group A. The German soldier gave me a baby carriage to use as a collecting bin. In those days baby carriages were deep and long, designed to hold a sleeping baby, unlike today's strollers, which are more seat-like than container.

I took the carriage and made my way over to the other side of the soccer field, moving slowly and quietly, trying to remain as inconspicuous as possible. As I tossed items into the carriage, I softly called out for Peska. It was getting dark and only intermittent light came from

~ Did Anyone Hold Her Hand? ~

the headlights of the trucks being filled with the young, the old, and the infirm in Group A. I continued to cautiously call out for Peska. Others in the group, hearing my plea, also helped me look for her. Miraculously, we found her crying by herself as the remaining group thinned and darkness descended onto the soccer field. As it was now getting cold in the night air, I told her to keep warm by quietly moving about until the truck lights passed by. When we were in a brief moment of darkness, I helped her climb into the baby carriage and continued on my way, covering her with collected remnants from people whose lives would soon be discarded. For this moment, I had saved the life of my little sister Peska and delivered her in the baby carriage to my father and sister Ester, who were waiting with Group B for transport to the Lodz ghetto.

In Lodz during the day, children who were too young to work congregated together and were looked after by women in the ghetto. The children received some education, but more important, they received meager daily food rations. While Peska spent her days with other young children, my father, Ester, and I toiled as slave laborers.



Lodz Ghetto, Poland

~ Jack Adler ~

There aren't too many other stories to be shared or memories from our time in Lodz. Everything was the same. The same clothes. The same food. The same work. The same nightmares. For nearly two more years we survived in this horrible place and were able to protect Peska. We remained in Ghetto Litzmannstadt in Lodz until it was liquidated in the summer of 1944. At the time, there were fewer than sixty-eight thousand of us left, a far cry from the height of just over three hundred thousand.

In spite of the years of misery and humiliation, we were blessed to still have our family intact, my father, Ester, Peska, and me. When the Lodz ghetto was finally liquidated, we were herded with the rest of the surviving inhabitants down to the train station and loaded onto cattle cars for destinations and destinies unknown.

After two days of unspeakable privations, crammed into cattle cars without food or water, Ester, a ghost of the beautiful young woman she had been, asked my father, "Where are we going?"

"We'll work, probably," said my father. I don't know how he did it, but he somehow refrained from any negativity during our entire experience in the Holocaust. He was a brave man and a good father.

Our final destination was Auschwitz, and the "selection" process once again divided men and boys from women and girls, those fit to work from those deemed useless.

We saved Peska once, but this time was different. I had been able to protect her for a little over two years, but now I was helpless. My eyes followed her and Ester, ignoring much of what was happening around me. As soldiers and prisoners alike passed through my line of sight, I kept searching for her. Spotting her long blonde hair, I was able to track her through the line. She followed the other women



~ Did Anyone Hold Her Hand? ~

through the selection process pressed to Ester's side and was pushed forward by the mob. She was crying and confused. When my sisters made it to the front of the line, soldiers split them – Ester moved to the work line, while Peska, now twelve years old, moved in the other direction.

My own selection came and went with little event; I was of age and healthy enough to serve the Nazis. My father was also passed through, and we moved in the direction that saved our lives for the moment. All the while, my eyes followed Peska. I didn't know her fate yet, but the news would come soon.

Even from a distance, I could see tears streaming down her face. Peska turned one last time. We locked eyes, maybe thirty yards apart. Her blonde hair fell over her face as she twisted to see me. Her beautiful eyes should never have been consumed by that much fear. She turned back when the woman behind her pushed, and then they all moved on to the gas chambers.

At some point after the war, I learned the truth. Those in the lines unable to work received orders to move toward buildings that housed what they were told were showers. There, they were told to remove all their clothing, losing the meager remnants of their dignity right before their death. Members of the Sonderkommando, the Jewish prisoners forced to work in the gas chambers, would then shave the heads of the victims and send them forward.

“Memorize your hook number,” soldiers told them, luring them into a false sense of security with the intimation they would return to their clothing. This was one last way to keep sheep culled and prevent panic.

Next, they were herded into large rooms whose ceilings were

~ Jack Adler ~

decorated with a mass of showerheads. When enough people had been collected, the soldiers outside shut and barred the doors with a clank of metal on metal. No water came from the showers, as surely so many expected. Peska must have been so scared during those last few moments of her life.

Instead of water to bathe in and quench a thirst that had lasted for so many days, the room filled with Zyklon-B gas. It only took minutes for the Nazis to kill everyone in the room. I wonder what my dear sister Peska was thinking. I wonder, did anyone hold her hand?

In 2011 I was invited to join the BJE March of the Living Los Angeles delegation and return to Poland. I thought long and hard about my participation and desire to attend. It was not an easy decision by any means. For sixty-seven years, I had never harbored the wish to see Poland again. However, once I decided to go, once I arrived with the group of teens in Lodz, everything came back to me. I was in a museum of my own life. All had been preserved in the ghetto – the cattle car that transported prisoners to Auschwitz, the railroad station from which prisoners were sent – it was all there. I closed my eyes and imagined being there with my father and Ester and Peska. I could see Peska so clearly . . . a beautiful little girl with clear blue eyes, her long blonde hair parted into two braids falling down her back.

I thought I had returned to Poland to tell my story to the high school students, but I now realized that I returned there to tell Peska's story, too. The students' interest and tense, edge-of-their-seat attention reinforced for me that this was my mission – to share my story, to remember Peska, and to tell her story, too.

We arrived in Auschwitz and made the three-kilometer walk to Birkenau. I was scared, to be honest. Although I hadn't spent much

~ Did Anyone Hold Her Hand? ~

time there, it was Peska's death that plagued me the most, that stayed with me the longest, that caused me as a young man in America to twist in my bed with nightmares. Today, the remains of the gas chambers lie strewn about like rubble, evidence of the Nazis' poor attempt at erasing their crimes – as if no one would care to remember that millions had died there.

I approached the debris holding red roses in memory of my baby sister. I trembled as I got closer to the rocks and concrete remnants of death. A light drizzle fell and gray clouds crept across the sky, increasing the melancholy of the moment, but serving as a stark and appropriate reminder of the sorrow the place holds. Peska took her last breath at that very spot, a breath full of poison and pain and fear.

I began to cry and gripped more tightly the black March of the Living umbrella given to me earlier. I stood as close to the remains as possible, and the group gathered around me. I don't know where I found the courage, but I began to speak.



Jack Adler and Monise Neumann  
Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland, 2012

"I arrived here with my father and two sisters; my baby sister was taken away to the gas chamber. And I can still see her face . . ." Tears began to overwhelm me as I brought the rose up to my face and paused. I bent to place the flower on the rocks



Elliot Adler films his father, Jack,  
saying Kaddish for Peska Adler

~ Jack Adler ~

and rubble at my feet. People around me took pictures and were respectfully silent, but they weren't there anymore anyway. I was with Peska, standing in line. The rain hit our faces, although in reality I held my umbrella. Each drop was a tear.

Ever since that day sixty-seven years ago, when I helplessly watched my baby sister Peska herded toward the gas chamber, the remains of which lay before me now, I wondered about how frightened she must have been all alone. I wondered, hoped, that maybe someone had held her hand.



Jack Adler  
BJE Los Angeles Delegation-March of the Living  
Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland  
2012

Now I was done. Somehow I had managed to tell Peska's story before the ruins of the gas chamber that had consumed her. There was a moment of silence, everyone respectful as they looked at me. I was not sure I could return again, not sure I could handle it. But I have since gone back to Poland, returning to that very place, for the past three years with high school students from the March of the Living. Through them and this experience, I have restored some of my own lost faith by seeing how kids from so many nations and creeds get along, how they behave, and how they care.

Story written by Jan Berlfein Burns  
with excerpts from *A Holocaust Narrative*  
by Jack Adler with W.F. Aspenwall



~ Jack Adler ~

In Memory of the  
Jack Adler Family

Cemach C. Adler ל"ט – father

Fella R. Adler ל"ט – mother

Chaim U. Adler ל"ט – brother

Ester Adler ל"ט – sister

Peska I. Adler ל"ט – sister

and many more aunts, uncles, and cousins who died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide

~ Did Anyone Hold Her Hand? ~

Survivors  
Jack Adler

The Next Generation  
CHILDREN  
(and spouses)  
Elliot C. and Laura Adler  
Paula F. and Les Shapiro

GRANDCHILDREN  
Lauren and Matthew Adler  
Jessie and Cary Shapiro



Adler Family

## Natalie Gold's Story



Leon Weinstein with daughter Natalie (Gold)  
Poland  
circa 1945



## ~ TO SAVE A CHILD ~

She was Jewish, but to live she needed a Christian name.

She could not be Natalie Leya Weinstein, not in wartime Warsaw. Her father wrote her new name on a piece of paper.

Natalie Yazinska.

Her mother, Sima, sobbed.

“The little one must make it,” Leon Weinstein told his wife. “We got no chance. But the little one, she is special. She must survive.”

He fixed a metal crucifix to a necklace and hung it on their daughter. On the paper, he scrawled another fiction: “I am a war widow, and I have no way of taking care of her. I beg of you good people, please take care of her. In the name of Jesus Christ, He will take care of you for this.”

A cold wind cut at the skin that December morning, so Leon Weinstein bundled up Natalie, 18 months old, in heavy pants and a thick wool sweater. He headed for a nearby apartment, the home of a lawyer and his wife. The couple did not have a child. Weinstein hoped they wanted one.

He lay Natalie on their front step. Tears ran down his cheeks. You will make it, he thought. She had blonde locks and blue eyes. They will think you are a Gentile, not one of us.

Walking away, he could hear her whimper, but forced himself not to look back until he crossed the street. Then he turned and saw a man step out of the apartment. The man read Weinstein’s note. He

~ Natalie Gold ~

puzzled over the baby.

Cradling Natalie in his arms, the man walked half a block to a police station and disappeared inside.

Weinstein was beside himself.  
What if the Gestapo took her from the police?  
What if they decided that she was a Jew?

Today, at his small Spanish-style home in Mid-City, Los Angeles, Weinstein, 101, recalls in agonizing detail what it was like to give up his baby in 1941 amid the Nazi juggernaut. He is frail, but his wit and memory are keen. He remembers well what followed: killing Germans, dodging death, hunting for Natalie.

Holocaust scholars vouch for his account, calling him one of the last living fighters from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, almost certainly the oldest.

For years, Weinstein kept his memories buried.

No more.

It is important to tell about Nazi horrors, he now says, so they are never forgotten. It is, he says, important to tell the story of his search for his little girl.

Weinstein was born in the Jewish village of Radzymin, Poland. As a child, he was independent, even stubborn. His family adhered to Orthodox Judaism, but he never fully believed. He defied his elders and grew into something of a tough guy. Eyes gleaming, he recalls those who called him a “dirty Jew.”

~ To Save a Child ~

“They’d meet my fists,” he says. “Then they’d be picking their teeth from the ground.”

By fifteen, he had run away from home and was living in Warsaw, where he worked as a tailor’s assistant, then for a clothing company. In his twenties, he married Sima. After Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, they were forced to live in Radzymin with other Jews.

Natalie was born the next year. When she was a year old, Weinstein heard a Nazi guard say that German troops would soon send everyone in Radzymin to a death camp.

He prepared to flee and begged his extended family to leave too. They refused, saying Germans would never do such a thing.

But Weinstein had seen Nazi cruelty firsthand. So he slipped away with his wife and daughter into the nearby forest. It was far from a haven: anti-Semitic Polish thugs roamed there.

Using forged papers that identified him as a Christian, Weinstein and his family headed to Warsaw. They hoped that the sprawling capital would be a good hiding place. Sima had no papers; if the Nazis caught her, all three might be killed.

A Polish couple promised to hide Sima, but Weinstein and the baby would draw too much attention. They decided to leave Natalie on the lawyer’s doorstep. Weinstein would head for the confines of the Warsaw ghetto, where fellow Jews would give him shelter.

“This was a place completely unimaginable,” Weinstein says. “A place worse even than the hell that Dante described.”

The ghetto was surrounded by an eleven-foot-high brick wall, barbed

~ Natalie Gold ~

wire and guards. More than 400,000 Jews had been forced inside the 3.5-square-mile area. By early 1943, an estimated 300,000 of them had been shipped to Treblinka, a death camp in northeast Poland.

Nazis rationed food for those who remained and many died of starvation. Disease killed thousands more. Weinstein feared constantly for Natalie and Sima and was certain he would die.

He joined the ghetto resistance. “If we were going to die,” Weinstein says, “we would do it on our own terms. We would die standing proud, on our feet, making a statement to the world. We would take as many of those bastards as we could kill.”

He helped organize and train resistance fighters. On occasion, using his forged papers, he talked his way out of the ghetto and smuggled weapons back inside.

On April 19, 1943, the first night of Passover, the Nazis began their final push to wipe out the ghetto. When German tanks rolled forward, Weinstein ran along rooftops in a fury, strafing Nazis with a machine gun.

The resistance held, but only for a while.

“When could I have been killed?” Weinstein says. “Every five minutes.” He says it again, pausing between each word. “Every... five...minutes.”

One day he was crouched on the second floor of an abandoned building when he heard the footsteps of Nazi troops on the stairs.

It’s over, he told himself.

~ To Save a Child ~

He looked out a window. A solitary soldier stood guard below.

Weinstein leaped. His steel-toed boots slammed into the soldier's head. "He fell like a sack of stones," Weinstein says. "I could see his skull, his blood, brains. For killing a man who hunted me, I felt nothing but good, and I was so excited I felt no pain."

"I was alive at least for another day."

Weinstein hid in sewers that swarmed with rats and human waste. He eventually found a way out that seemed safe, but was too weak to lift the iron cover.

Was this how he would die?

He fell asleep and dreamed of his grandfather, a deeply religious man. "You must keep going," his grandfather told him. "You must. Don't stop."

Weinstein awoke with new energy. He hunched his back against the manhole cover, gathered all of his strength, and pushed. It opened.

In the early morning darkness, he hunted for someone who would shelter a fleeing Jew who stank of sewage and looked as though he might collapse and die.

A Warsaw couple he had known before the war took him in.

Weinstein asked after his relatives who had stayed behind in Radzymin. All were dead. He looked for Sima. He learned she was dead too.

In Spring 1945, the war was over, and surviving Jews began to leave the country. Weinstein was not among them. He had to find Natalie.

~ Natalie Gold ~

His first stop was the street where he'd left his little girl. It was mostly rubble, but one building stood untouched—the police station.

He walked in. “Do you remember hearing about an abandoned girl who was taken here?”

One officer did. The girl had been taken to a nearby convent.

The nuns there remembered, too. The baby was among several they tried to shelter. Disease claimed some, but the baby named Natalie survived. When the fighting drew near, she was sent to a cloister in the countryside.

Over bombed-out roads, pedaling hard on his bicycle, Weinstein made his way there. But Natalie was gone, sent to another group of nuns. On he went, to convent after convent, sometimes sleeping in the fields.

The story was the same. Natalie had been there, but nobody knew where she was now. Nobody knew if she was alive.

After six months, Weinstein returned to the city, exhausted.

Then, against all hope, he decided to visit a convent near the ghetto. He walked past a statue of the Virgin Mary, then into a hall where dozens of pale, thin orphans stood.

“Mister, mister.” They grabbed at his tall, brown boots. “Mister, mister, take me, take me.”

As he drew away, frustrated, a nun walked past, carrying a bony, blond girl, who looked about four. He looked into the child's eyes.

~ To Save a Child ~

They were blue. This, he said, was Natalie.

“She is yours?” the nun asked. “How can we know?”

“If she is,” Weinstein said, “then she has a little brown birthmark, the size of a pencil eraser, just near her right hip.”



Natalie (Gold) and  
Leon Weinstein  
Poland, circa 1945

The nun lifted the girl’s dirty gray shirt and they looked.

He had found Natalie.

Weinstein and Natalie moved to France.

In time, he married Sophie, another Holocaust survivor and they had a son, Michael.

In 1952, the family took a ship to New York, then a train to Los Angeles, where Weinstein became a successful clothing manufacturer.

In 1993, Michael died in a car accident. Twelve years later, Sophie died of heart disease.

Weinstein remains full of life. He recites the Torah at Congregation Atzei Chaim, the Beverly Grove synagogue he has attended for seven decades.

He reads three newspapers and sips at least one glass of Chivas Regal, on the rocks, every day.

He rarely goes more than two waking hours without telephoning the woman who fusses over him, who tends to his every need. She is a psychologist known by her married name: Natalie Gold Lumer. Every Friday night, father and daughter share a Shabbat meal. They

~ Natalie Gold ~

gather with family and friends, light candles, hold hands, tell stories, and offer lengthy prayers of thanks.

“It was terrible, what I went through,” Weinstein said at a dinner not long ago. “But it was worth what I came away with: my beautiful daughter.”

Natalie looked at him, shaking her head. There was a long silence.

“To have a father with such courage,” she said, finally. “Well, I owe everything to him...I owe him my life.”

Story written by Kurt Streeter



Daughter, Natalie Gold, and father, Leon Weinstein,  
dance at his 100th birthday celebration.  
(Leon Weinstein died December 28, 2011. He was 101.)





~ Natalie Gold ~

In Memory of the  
Natalie Weinstein (Gold) Family

Sima Ossofsky Weinstein ל"ט – mother  
Rachel ל"ט and Moshe Ossofsky ל"ט – grandparents  
Huma ל"ט and Yoseph Weinstein ל"ט – grandparents

and many more aunts, uncles, and cousins who died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide



Weinstein Family  
Radzymin, Poland  
1938

~ To Save a Child ~

## Survivors

Natalie Weinstein Gold

Leon Weinstein ל"ל

## The Next Generation

CHILDREN

Robert Gold

Annette Gold



Weinstein and Gold Family  
2011

## Robert Geminder's Story



Robert and brother George Geminder  
Bielsko, Poland  
1938

## ~ WANDERING JEWS ~

I was born August 3, 1935, at 12 noon on a Saturday in Wroclaw (Breslau), Poland. My mother, Bertl (Bertha), was born in 1912 in Bielsko, Poland. My father, Emil (Mano) Geminder, was born in 1891 in Tarnow, Poland. My parents were married on March 13, 1932, in Bielsko. My brother, George (Yaakov), was born on May 31, 1933, in Bielsko. My father was very wealthy and owned many apartment buildings in Poland and Berlin. Our family of four lived very well and had a very good life.

When I was three years old, our lives changed forever. It was 1938. The Gestapo came to our apartment and told us to take just a little luggage and follow them. They sent us by train to the Polish border along with hundreds of other people. In the border town of Zbonszyn, the Poles would not let us in and the Germans would not take us back. Eventually the Poles had to let us in, since we were Polish citizens. "This was the beginning of the bad times," as my mother said in an interview years later. We moved from place to place and wound up in Stanislawow, Poland. Since my parents had money and jewelry, we could exchange these items for food and other necessities.

In May 1941, during the Blitzkrieg, my father, Mano, was overcome by fear and stress. While we were preparing for the bombardment and pushing a mattress against the windows, my father had a heart attack and died. He was buried in the old Jewish cemetery in Stanislawow.

A few days after the Germans came into our city, they demanded that all Jews come to the square in the center of town. They transported everyone to a cemetery. On that day, October 12, 1941, the Nazis shot thousands of Jews in Stanislawow. I was only six and had to crouch in a cemetery and watch as 12,000 people were executed and pushed into mass graves. However, my grandmother, mother, older brother,

~ Robert Geminder ~

and I survived. Since we got to the cemetery first, we were in the back among the 6,000 to 8,000 people. When it got dark and began to snow, those of us who were left were told to go home. When the Germans announced this, there was pandemonium and everyone ran toward the back to exit the cemetery. My brother, George, and I were knocked down and separated from my mother. My grandmother fell to the ground. She started looking for her shoe. She recognized my coat and found George and me alive. After climbing a tall fence, we made our way out of the cemetery back to our apartment. Prior to leaving for the cemetery, my mother, at the advice of my grandfather, hid her diamonds and gold in a false-bottom bucket, which was left untouched. Later these items were very instrumental in our survival.

The remaining Jews were relocated to a ghetto in Stanislawow. The conditions in the ghetto were horrible. When I stepped outside our very small apartment, I saw people killed; I saw babies being thrown against the wall, people hanged from telephone wires.

The Jews became the workforce of the Germans. When the Germans searched our apartment for people who were not working, my grandmother hid us in a closet and placed wood in front. When the dogs sniffed the area, because of the wood they didn't discover us – that was the second time my grandmother saved our lives.

My mother was working for the Nazis outside the ghetto. When she heard a rumor that the Nazis were planning to kill everyone in the ghetto, she came up with a plan to smuggle her family to safety. I walked out of the ghetto under my mother's skirt, and my brother walked out of the ghetto under my mother's best friend's skirt. We escaped with my mother, brother, and Emil Brotfeld, whom my mother had met in the ghetto and later married.

We traveled around Poland, living as Gentiles with the assumed name

~ Wandering Jews ~

of Kaminsky. My mother didn't think that all of us could survive if we remained together. In 1943 she arranged to save my brother and me. She contacted a Gentile woman who lived on a farm near Krakow. The woman's name was Grochalova. My mother did not have money to pay her; thus she agreed to an arrangement whereby if the woman kept us until the end of the war, our apartment building would belong to her.

After a few months, George had to go home, because while we were in church, instead of taking off his cap, he put on his cap. The people immediately started suspecting that we must be Jewish. My mother came to pick us up, but she felt it would be difficult and possibly dangerous to take us both. Thus, she took George and left me.

Grochalova's family had to hide me and decided to put me in an attic in the house. Many times they forgot to take care of me and did not feed me. In the evenings, I would climb down the ladder or out the attic window and pick through the food that was left by the pig. When the chicken came up to the attic and laid an egg, I took the egg and drank it raw. There was a hatchet; often I wanted to take the hatchet and put it in my stomach, but I was afraid it would hurt, so I did not.

After about three months, my mother came back to pick me up. When she climbed up the ladder, she saw this boy with long hair and lice. My mother said I had actually been talking to my shadow . . . to my own shadow. I hadn't been washed in three months.

During the war, in order to survive, George and I made cigarettes, and my mother went out every day and sold them. This way, she made some money and was able to buy some food for us.

At all times, we were forced to be on the move whenever people

~ Robert Geminder ~

started to suspect we were Jewish. My hair was bleached blond so the people would not recognize that I was Jewish. When Christmas came, we put a tree in the window and left the window open so that everybody should see the beautiful tree.

In 1944, we were living outside Warsaw. We could hear the Russians approaching the area. We went into the city where at that time the Polish underground was trying to liberate the city from Nazi rule. The Polish underground consisted of mainly Jewish people that had escaped into the forest. The uprising lasted for three months. After the uprising failed, the Germans planned to eliminate the city's population. Everyone was loaded onto trains, which were headed to Auschwitz. We, as Jews, knew what was going to happen; we knew we were going to be killed. As we were waiting to board the train, my mother noticed that one of the cars had an opening on top, so we made our way toward that car. We were on the train for many hours. The train stopped for a red light. It stopped about a hundred yards from the Auschwitz concentration camp. My stepfather, Emil, lifted me up over the open car and I was able to open the train car door. We jumped through the open door and escaped. I remember jumping from the train down the embankment. I was so scared to jump, and when I landed my leg hurt badly. However, I did not say anything. While we escaped, other people who were not Jewish hesitated and then tried to escape, but the Gestapo was on top of the train shooting. We were hiding on the side of the road under a haystack, lying there waiting for an opportunity to crawl out. When the light vanished, we did. The train left and disappeared through the gates of Auschwitz.

We stayed in a little village and waited for the Russians to come. We were liberated by them a couple of months later.

In 1945, the war was over. We heard a siren that went on for hours and hours. My mother said, "I don't know another family that survived



## ~ Wandering Jews ~

with two boys.” Wherever we went, my mother would leave a note with the Jewish Federation. The notes read: “Bertha Geminder is alive.” We went to our hometown, Bielsko, with hopes that anyone from the family that did survive would also come to this city. Only one cousin (Joe Rottersman) survived. He went into the Russian army and was able to follow us because of my mother’s notes.

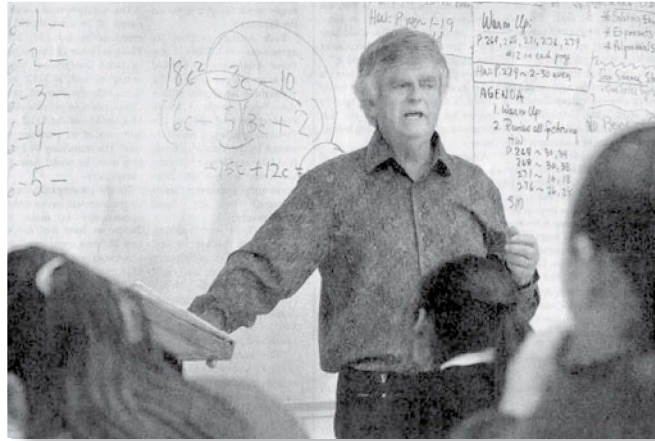
As time went on, life became much better. We had enough to eat since my stepfather was now able to earn some money. One day my brother and I went to a movie by ourselves. The movie was called “Gunga Din.” After the movie, we came home crying because some Polish boys had thrown stones after us, screaming, “Jews go to Palestine.” Following this incident, my mother decided to leave Poland.

We left Poland for Czechoslovakia. We could enter into this country, which was under Communist rule, without any difficulty. Then we went to the American zone in West Germany. We crossed the border in the wintertime, climbing mountains and going through tunnels in the snow. We did this with the help of a guide who knew the way. When we crossed the border, we saw the Americans for the first time, in Regensburg. We ended up in a United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) displaced people’s camp in Aglasterhausen, West Germany. The Americans treated us well, we ate well, and I learned some very important things. I learned how to chew gum and blow bubbles, and I learned some English words, though mostly ones I could not use in public.

In February of 1947, we took a boat to America and settled with extended family in Pittsburgh, where I quickly learned English. I graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in 1957 with a degree in electrical engineering. Following my graduation, I went into the U.S. Army and served at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

~ Robert Geminder ~

When I was twenty-one, I started a family tree and began to seek out other people with the name Geminder. Wherever I traveled, I did research by looking up my family name in telephone books. I



Robert Geminder teaching at St Mary's Academy High School  
Inglewood, California, 2008

discovered over 200 Geminders and most are related to me. For example, in Israel I found my closest relative, my father's brother. My uncle was astonished at finding me alive, having assumed that all other members of his family had perished in the Holocaust. I discovered other relatives in many countries, including Chile, Israel, Brazil, and the United States. I brought many people together who never knew of the existence of their relatives.

I married Judy Strauss in 1959 and we have three children – daughters Mindy and Ellen and son, Shia.

During the last five years of my engineering career, I began to reflect on what else I would like to do after leaving my profession as engineer. Retiring never appealed to me and is not part of my vocabulary. Rather, I spent those years considering how to transition into another career and quickly focused on teaching.

## ~ Wandering Jews ~

For many years, I frequently thought of my survival as a Holocaust victim. I realized that young children were growing up in a world where the news and memories of the Holocaust were slowly disappearing. I was determined to make certain that they would be aware there was a Holocaust. Over the years I have spoken about the Holocaust to thousands of middle and high school children. I thoroughly enjoy the interaction with them and learned that many had never met a Holocaust survivor. When I began reflecting on another career, I knew that teaching was my new calling.

In 2007, I received my teaching credentials and masters degree in education from Loyola Marymount University. Today, I am teaching science and math at Los Angeles schools and also am a tutor in math. As high school students approach an important period of decisionmaking, they need proper guidance.

I feel I can make my greatest impact with them. I love teaching, and many friends are puzzled why I would devote myself to such a difficult and time-consuming profession at this stage of my life. I admit that the work is hard, much harder than my work as an engineer. However, I never measure my activity by the difficulty in doing it, but rather by the purpose and satisfaction I gain and what I am able to give others. It is difficult to describe how much pleasure I derive from knowing that I play an important role in guiding children to prepare for the times when they will be adults.

Recently, I was elected to be part of the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust. I am a regular speaker at that museum and in many schools all throughout the California area.

I created my own website dedicated to the Holocaust and the tale of survival: [www.geminder.us](http://www.geminder.us).

Story written by Robert Geminder

~ Robert Geminder ~

In Memory of the  
Robert Geminder Family

Menachem Mendel Geminder ז"ל – father  
Ira ז"ל and Golde Glotzer ז"ל – grandparents

and many more aunts, uncles, and cousins who died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide

~ Wandering Jews ~

### Survivors

Robert Geminder (married Judith Strauss ל"ט)

Bertha Brotfeld ל"ט- mother

Emil Brotfeld ל"ט- stepfather

George Geminder ל"ט- brother

### The Next Generation

CHILDREN  
(and spouse)

Mindy Geminder

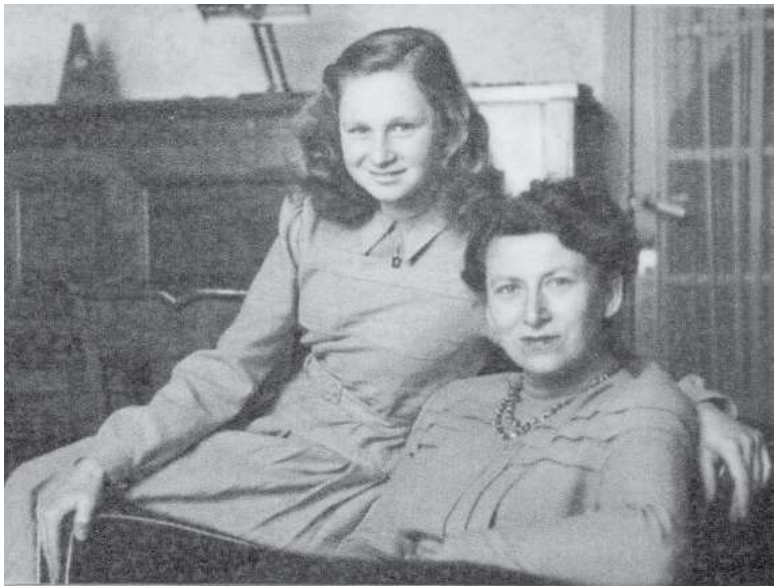
Ellen Geminder

Shia and Donella Geminder



Geminder Family

Eva Perlman's Story  
as told by her mother  
Charlotte Gutmann



Eva (Perlman) and Charlotte Gutmann  
Paris, France  
1953

## ~ THE BICYCLE ACCIDENT ~

It was a beautiful day nearing the end of summer in the French Alps. Maggy Levier and I were two young women riding on rickety old bicycles through alpine villages on the mountainous roads. The wicker baskets hanging from the front handlebars of our bikes were filled to the brim with food provisions and an assortment of men's clothing. We were intent on our destination, but not certain of the route we should take. The day was August 31, 1944, and the war that raged in Europe was not yet over.

Just six weeks earlier, in mid-July on Bastille Day, my husband, Rodolphe, myself, and our three children, Eva, twelve, Ernest, nine, and Raymond, five, had ventured out on a hike up into the high Alpine meadows for a picnic. Below us in the village of Autrans, brightly colored flags adorning homes and shops fluttered in the summer breeze. The sky was blue, the summer wildflowers bloomed, and we tried to keep the war out of mind for the day. As we shared our family picnic, we saw airplanes flying above. Their presence added to the spirit of the day as we thought they were Allied planes continuing to push back the defeated Germans with the Allied victory in North Africa. Recently, we had been buoyed by the news of the Allied invasion in Normandy on June 6, 1944. Now here were the Allies coming from North Africa advancing into southern France to liberate us.

Our optimism was short-lived. The pristine mountain air was soon disturbed by the sounds and smoke of bombs being dropped on a nearby village. The



Gutmann Family  
Ernest, Charlotte, Raymond,  
Eva (Perlman) and Rodolphe

~ Eva Perlman ~

airplanes flying overhead we thought to be our liberators were actually German planes finally piercing through our mountain fortress. Our family outing and Bastille Day celebration came to an abrupt halt as Rodolphe and I quickly gathered up the children and ran down from the mountain meadow. As we made our way back to the village, Rodolphe said to me, “The net is tightening; if the Nazis catch me, I want to have a weapon in my hands to defend myself to my last breath!”

With these thoughts freshly imprinted in his mind, the next day, July 15th, Rodolphe left Autrans with our friend Serge Levier and his son-in-law, Henri Bamberger, to procure weapons and join the underground forces (FFI, or Forces Françaises de l’Interieur).

To further set the scene, let me backtrack briefly and provide some historical context. By November 1942, just two years after Germany occupied France, we had come to live (or hide) in the village of Autrans high in the French Alps. It was a community that sheltered many Jewish refugees who had managed to escape from their homes in cities and towns across occupied France and were hiding from the murderous grasp of the Nazis. Autrans was located in a high mountain valley in southern France near Grenoble. Because of its geography and limited roadway accessibility, the area created a natural fortress, which had kept the German army at bay, at least temporarily. We had lived there relatively undisturbed until September 1943, when Italy made a separate peace agreement with the Allies. The Italian troops retreated from southern France, leaving the Germans to move in, imposing their harsh regime on the entire region. During the winter of 1943-1944 the Germans made dreaded incursions into the Vercors, a high mountainous plateau that encompassed our village of Autrans. The Vercors, at the time, was being held by the FFI, a small underground army composed of resisters to the enemy and to the Vichy government. Fortunately, the Germans thought the army was



## ~ The Bicycle Accident ~

much larger and more well-equipped than it actually was.

Following our Bastille Day picnic, my husband joined the FFI and fully participated in the ensuing Battle of the Vercors, not to become a hero or to presume to help victory along. But in the heavily forested Alps, the FFI resisters managed at a crucial time to detain two German divisions – which were thus considered missing in the south.

During his absence and the subsequent German occupation of Autrans, we had had a fairly close call when a Nazi officer took up temporary residence in the yellow house where I was living with my three children. Fortunately all my children had blond hair and blue eyes resembling me more than Rodolphe, who looked more “typically” Jewish. Our landlord M. Ravaud, who spoke no German, asked me not only to give up my bedroom for the officer, but also to serve as an interpreter. Not to arouse suspicion, I posed as a native French speaker who could speak only pidgin German and interpreted as best I could.



Our landlords - The Ravaud Family



The yellow house in Autrans, France

In fact, I was born in Driesen, Germany, and had been a medical student at the University of Berlin in 1933 when on October 3rd of that year I was immediately excluded from all studies because of my “Marxist” activities, though in truth my crime was having been born Jewish, as I was no political activist. My husband was prohibited from practicing patent law in Germany shortly thereafter.

~ Eva Perlman ~

Fortunately, his colleagues invited him to join their firm in Paris, so we moved to France in 1933. We ultimately became French citizens, and my husband was able to work there until Paris, too, became unsafe for Jews.

The Battle of the Vercors, for which Rodolphe, Serge, and Henri had taken up arms, was short-lived and the only action most of the resisters from our region would see. The Résistance army was officially disbanded. Those who had volunteered were told to disappear and save themselves. Because the Germans still occupied the area, Rodolphe and Serge thought it best to lie low for a while. They had given up their Résistance uniforms for civilian clothes and were making their way through farms and villages, trying to keep clear as best they could of German patrols. Eventually, they made their way to St. Martin d'Août, a town about ninety kilometers from Autrans, where Serge had a friend. Henri, in an attempt to return home more quickly, had taken a shortcut through the mountains back to Autrans, fell into German hands, and was executed. I learned of Henri's death when I was called to the neighboring town to identify his body. However, I still did not know the whereabouts of my husband and Serge.

August days passed by without news of Rodolphe or Serge. Grenoble was liberated on August 23, 1944; for the Vercors the war was over. Still we waited for news. There was no telephone service in the mountains, but when there was news, it traveled quickly by word of mouth from post office to post office, hotel to hotel, village to village. As I returned home from my morning shopping on August 30th, my children greeted me in the front yard and anxiously relayed a message.

“Maman, the priest was here, he wanted to speak to you. He left a message upstairs.”

~ The Bicycle Accident ~

I climbed the stairs with legs suddenly made of jelly. On the kitchen table lay a piece of paper quickly torn out of a pad, without a date, no doubt written by the priest. It said:

“M. Gutmann and Cdr. Levier are in St. Martin d’Août, in the Drôme, lacking money and civilian clothing. Asking one of their wives, preferably Mme. G bring them money and clothing...”

To this day, I cannot understand why I did not dash out to see the priest to find out how he happened to possess that piece of paper or that information, how old the message could be, and to thank him. Instead, I ran to Claire Levier’s house to tell her.

“Our husbands are safe,” I told her. “They need money and clothes. I must go immediately by bicycle to St. Martin d’Août to bring them those items.”

Claire’s daughter, Maggy, who was just sixteen years old, insisted on coming with me. We quickly rented two bicycles and asked the advice of Dr. Chauve and the butcher, Mr. Barnier, both of whom had been of invaluable help to the FFI.

“How can we reach St. Martin?” I asked them. “Should we travel through Grenoble? Did they have a roadmap? Was the Grenoble area already safe?”

“Careful,” they said. “There are still skirmishes here and there. Go toward Grenoble to the Red Cross. If they tell you that you can continue, fine. If not, entrust your package and the money to them, with name and address, and they will deliver it as soon as possible.”

In great haste, I assembled as much as I could for our trek to St. Martin. Before leaving, I took my three children, Eva, Ernest, and

~ Eva Perlman ~



Children at Clairfontaine Pension d'Enfants, the Catholic children's boarding school

Raymond, to Roland and Geneviève Menthonnex at Clairfontaine with instructions that the children should be sent to Mr. Plasseraud in Paris if neither I nor my husband should return. Mme. Menthonnex had earlier told us, "In case of hardship or difficulty, send the children to us, simply with their suitcase," and I had great faith that Mr. Plasseraud would do what was necessary to send the children to my parents in Palestine after the war, should it come to that.

So here I am at the beginning of my story again. Maggy Levier and I were two young women riding on rickety old bicycles through alpine villages on the mountainous roads. Did our appearance betray our mission? Two young women clothed in summer skirts and cotton blouses, pedaling in heavy hiking boots, our bikes laden down with supplies. Now on the road to Grenoble, anxiously, we started climbing to the Croix Perrin Pass. The road had become too steep so we got off our bikes and pushed them. With wicker baskets filled to the brim with food provisions and an assortment of men's clothing, we hiked up to the summit pass. Before beginning the descent down to the town of Lans, we rested for a moment in a mountain meadow and hastily ate the sandwiches we had brought along.

## ~ The Bicycle Accident ~

Back on our bikes, eager to be on our way, we began the descent. It didn't take long for me to discover that the brakes on the old bicycle didn't work. Furiously I kept applying pressure to the brakes while assessing my options – none of which were good. To my left were the rocks against the mountainside of the road and to my right, the cliff. The road was a series of hairpin turns and my speed was mounting. Bend after bend, I flew along the road at top speed, quickly approaching a very narrow hairpin curve, where I fell. The bike dragged me dozens of meters on my stomach, my right hand clinging to the useless brake of the handlebar, pulling me along with it. There I remained sprawled out in the middle of the road, the left side of my face skinned and bleeding, my blouse ripped, my left hand, elbow, and knee encrusted with pebbles. My left ankle was broken, my right thumb completely dislocated, the flexor tendon torn, and the first joint hanging. Maggy fell off her bike too with a big part of the brake stuck in her forearm.

Our expedition was over and I could only lament incessantly, “My husband... my husband... How will I reach him now? My husband... my husband...”

Maggy began to cry, too. Within moments of our calamitous accident, people appeared on the road. They had been picking berries and mushrooms and emerged from the surrounding forest when they heard our cries. We were only two to three kilometers away from the village of Lans.

One man set off immediately for help while the others carefully moved both Maggy and me off to the side of the road. Another man had some brandy with him, which he offered to us with a cube of sugar. I insisted that he give it to Maggy, who was now in a state of shock. After some time the first man, who had gone to town, returned with a bottle of fresh water and news that a cart was on its

~ Eva Perlman ~

way to collect us. Tears streamed down my face as I took the water and used it to clean away the dirt and pebbles embedded in my skin. Our foolhardy plan was doomed. Where was my husband now and how would I ever get the needed supplies to him?

Let me backtrack here and fill in the details of Rodolphe's story up to this point. Following the Battle of the Vercors, Rodolphe and Serge, suspecting continued unrest in the area, made their way to St. Martin d'Août, where Serge knew someone who might take them in until things settled down. Their journey was not without danger. They cautiously made their way through German-patrolled fields and villages, keeping out of sight as best they could. They slept in barns and accepted a piece of bread or cup of milk from compassionate farmers along the way. One such farmer lent them a wheelbarrow filled with hay covering their knapsacks and enabling them to pass without suspicion under the noses of the German soldiers. Rodolphe and Serge walked along the road very slowly, pushing the wheelbarrow as though they were farmers returning from the fields. Finally, they reached St. Martin d'Août, where they rested and were cared for.

The townspeople were thirsting for news of the Vercors, wanting to know what had happened up there during the battle. Rodolphe and Serge were taken for officers of the Résistance, perhaps because they were older than most soldiers or perhaps because of their foreign accents. As they relayed their knowledge of the events to this little gathering, they voiced their concern for us, their families still in Autrans. The Nazis had killed so many in the region, and Rodolphe and Serge were justifiably worried for our safety.

Among the townspeople, a young priest, Father Petit, offered a plan.

"Listen," he said. "I will go to Grenoble, and from there to Autrans, to reassure your loved ones and bring you news of them."

~ The Bicycle Accident ~

But Rodolphe and Serge could not accept this kindness. “Father,” they said. “The area is still infested with Nazis. They will take you for a priest of the Résistance. You’ll risk too much. And... we are Jews...”

“That does not matter,” Father Petit reassured them. “I would even say on the contrary! Leave it to me. I will plan my trip before going off to Grenoble. If the Germans stop me, what could I tell them?”

“There is a large sanatorium for 300 to 350 children in Autrans,” offered Rodolphe.

“Good! I’ll tell them that my parishioners who have children there are anxious about them, and I would like to get news of them.”

The next morning, Father Petit set out on his bicycle toward Grenoble. But the following day he returned to St. Martin d’Août, his heart heavy, his mission incomplete. The Nazis still controlled much of the area surrounding Grenoble, and he was not able to pass through to Autrans to check on the families. He did, however, manage to scrawl a cryptic note on a torn piece of paper that he had passed along to another priest with the request to have it delivered to Charlotte Gutmann in Autrans.

The note read, “M. Gutmann and Cdr. Levier are in St. Martin d’Août, in the Drôme lacking money and civilian clothing. Asking one of their wives, preferably Mme. G bring them money and clothing...”

This was the note I received from the unknown priest the day before I set off with Maggy on our fateful journey. When Father Petit recounted his tale to Rodolphe and Serge, describing the note and its contents, my husband was alarmed to hear that the note might be delivered. Though appreciative of the priest’s great courage and

~ Eva Perlman ~



Charlotte Gutmann  
Autrans, France  
1942

noble efforts, Rodolphe had reservations. “The only thing that worries me,” he explained to Father Petit, “is the message you left with the priest in Sassenage. Imagine that he succeeds in passing it to someone, and then it reaches my wife. If I know her, she will dash out immediately, and if she falls into the hands of the Nazis, on her bicycle laden with men’s clothing, she will be accused of supplying the Résistance, and her fate will be sealed. I must get to Autrans at all costs to prevent my wife’s departure.”

My husband left at dawn the next morning, racing to get to me before I could make my way to him. Serge had hurt his foot while helping to bring in the hay. It had become infected so he was not able to make the journey with Rodolphe. At the price of a thousand difficulties, my husband walked relentlessly, rode a train part of the way, fell into the hands of a group of FFL (Forces Françaises Libres, communist rivals of the FFI), was suspected of being a German in civilian clothes because of his accent, and was under threat of being shot. Fortunately, he was able to give details of the FFI. So he was released and even provided with a pass.

When Rodolphe got to Sassenage, he was told: “You’re lucky... The cable railway to St. Nizier has been working again since this morning.”

From St. Nizier, a town now in ruins, Rodolphe walked the last five or six kilometers to Lans, where he arrived exhausted. He happened to recognize a woman standing in the doorway of her house.

“Is there anyway I can get to Autrans before nightfall?” he asked her.



## ~ The Bicycle Accident ~

At that moment, a farmer was passing by her house in his cart. The woman pointed to him and said, “He’s on his way to Croix Perrin now. Apparently two women have had an accident. He can help to get you part of the way,” she said. And so Rodolphe hoisted himself onto the seat beside the driver.

Meanwhile, Maggy and I waited by the side of the road for help to come for what seemed an eternity. We were distressed, injured, and frightened. Finally I heard in the distance the trot of an approaching horse. Our rescue wagon appeared from around the bend in the road. As the cart approached, a man’s voice called out, startling me:

“Charlotte!” he shouted.

I turned to look toward the familiar voice and by the grace of God saw my husband, Rodolphe, perched on the cart beside the farmer!

Without this accident, Maggy and I would have taken a different route and been near Grenoble by then. We most likely would have fallen into German hands, because the area was still full of Nazis. Looking suspicious on our bikes, transporting men’s clothing, food, and money, chances are we would have been executed on the spot. My husband would have returned to Autrans, found an empty house, and known great anguish.

Instead, our paths miraculously crossed. Call it Providence, a miracle, or the work of angels. We were blessed on that day with our roadside reunion. After recovering our spirits, Rodolphe accompanied Maggy and me to the infirmary in Lans, where a young surgeon took care of us. With delicate hands, he washed and disinfected our various wounds, and stitched and bandaged them. He sewed the tendon of my right thumb and put a cast on my left ankle. We rested for a few days until Serge eventually joined us. Together we all returned to our loved ones in Autrans.

~ Eva Perlman ~



Charlotte Gutmann  
circa 1998

This was my mother's story and though it was miraculous, it was not the only miracle we experienced during the war. Why did we survive? The village of Vassieux, a neighbor to Autrans, was in ruins, leveled, with all inhabitants massacred. Again, we were so close to the destruction. Why were we protected by Providence? Why did we experience these miracles that kept my parents, my brothers, and me alive when so many others had died?

After decades of asking myself those questions, I finally came to an answer. I am alive today so that I can travel with the March of the Living delegates, sharing my family story with today's youth with hopes that they will share it with others. Whereas these wartime horrors should never be forgotten, neither should the miracles.



Eva Perlman telling the story of  
"The Bicycle Accident"  
Encino, California, 2014

Story written by Jan Berlfein Burns  
as adapted from the writing of Charlotte Gutmann



~ Eva Perlman ~

In Memory of the  
Eva Gutmann (Perlman) Family

whose thirty-four aunts, uncles, and cousins died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide

~ The Bicycle Accident ~

## Survivors

Eva Gutmann Perlman (married Mel Perlman ל"ט)

Rodolphe Gutmann ל"ט - father

Charlotte Gutmann ל"ט - mother

Ernest and Raymond Gutmann - brothers

## The Next Generation

CHILDREN  
(and spouses)

Ilana Yael and Mark Meskin

Tamar Alisa and Brian Trushinski

David Jonathan Perlman and Marilyn Eisenstein

## GRANDCHILDREN

Diane and Myra Meskin

Rachel and Joel Trushinski

Lisa and David Perlman



Perlman Family

## Dorothy Greenstein's Story



Dvorah Kirszenbaum  
(Dorothy Greenstein)  
Munich, Germany  
1948

## ~ PROTECTED BY ANGELS ~

I woke up screaming from a dream about my father. The walls in the Warsaw apartment building were very solid, so when the woman I was working for came into the kitchen where I slept, I knew my screams must have been really loud. My fear grew as I awoke from the dream. Did my employer understand that I was talking to my father in Yiddish? And would this dispel my cover story that I was a Polish girl whose parents were fighting the Nazis in the forest and they had left me to fend for myself in spite of the fact that I was only eleven years old?

I had been left to fend for myself, but not because my parents were in the forest fighting the Nazis. Far from it.

I was born on December 10, 1930, in Otwock, a town not far from Warsaw (fifteen minutes by electric car) known for its clean air and resort establishments. I was the youngest child of Yehoshua and Golda Kirszenbaum, and I had six sisters and two brothers. My father was a rabbi and a judge and highly respected by both the Jewish and Gentile communities. He also earned his livelihood as a shochet (Jewish ritual slaughterer), examining the animals when they were slaughtered to make sure they were healthy and kosher. We were raised in a strict Orthodox home, but my father had some liberal practices. For instance, we all learned to speak Polish in addition to Yiddish. This was not the norm in many Jewish households. And my sisters and



The Kirszenbaum sisters  
Otwock, Poland  
1938

~ Dorothy Greenstein ~

I all went to public school rather than Jewish school. (Our brothers went to Yeshiva.) Both of these things would prove to be life saving for me after the war began.

Our family life was happy and comfortable before the Nazis invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. My father had built the building we lived in. On the first floor, he built a large apartment for our family and leased out a store space, and upstairs he had an apartment for tenants as well as one for my older unmarried sisters. My mother had two maids to help her manage the large household, so as the youngest child, I had no obligation to help with anything.

With the Nazi occupation came prohibitions, and they came slowly, one at a time. A placard would be posted in our town delivering the decree. The first was the prohibition from owning radios. "All radios must be turned over to the Nazis," read the placard. The next was the prohibition from owning furs. Then we were prohibited from owning leather.

My father was a good-natured man who trusted the Germans certainly more than he trusted the Poles. With each Nazi prohibition my father would say, "We can live without that. After the war, we'll replace it. . . . after the war, I'll buy your mother a new fur coat . . ." Little did any of us know that neither of my parents would live to see "after the war."

For two and a half years we managed to obey (most) of the increasing restrictions dictated by the Nazis. We'd moved by decree from our home into the ghetto. My mother found us a place in the ghetto near my grandfather. The apartment had one room and a kitchen for seven of us—my parents, my brother Mordchai, and me and my sisters Rachel, Sarah, and Naomi, who were unmarried. We left all our possessions behind in the apartment my father had built, except for a change of clothes and four mattresses for all of us.



~ Protected by Angels ~

Once in the ghetto, each family was given a ration booklet for their weekly food allotment of bread and potatoes. However, my large family needed more food than that to survive. As the youngest and smallest family member, I had the best chance of moving unnoticed in and out of the ghetto. So each week my father gave me a little money (which we had because my sister had a store) and I found a way to cross to the Polish side, where I could buy some extra food. The Nazi soldiers did not patrol the ghetto boundaries, but the Polish people could be as cruel as the Nazis, so I needed to find a place to cross where no one would notice me. I found a block fence and climbed over it unnoticed. Once on the Polish side, I did my shopping without fear. I looked like a little Polish girl with my blue eyes and fair hair arranged in two long braids that fell across the front of my shoulders.

On August 18th 1942, when my father returned from prayers, he called the family together. He had learned that the Nazis were going to “resettle” us to somewhere new. He determined that my mother and brother Mordchai would go to the resettlement but my three sisters and I should make every attempt to save ourselves on the Polish side with friends.

“Your mother and I have fulfilled our commandments to G-d. We’ve married, had children, taught our children well. You haven’t had the chance to fulfill G-d’s commandments. It is not your time to come with us, and we will only hamper your survival. You must save yourselves. Go, leave the ghetto now.”

He gave us each instructions on where we were to go and gave us merchandise from our store to take as form of payment. Rachel was told to go to Sergeant Koralek, a friend of my father who was a Polish policeman; Sarah and Naomi were sent together to a Polish family who lived in our building; and I was to go to the court reporter, Pan

~ Dorothy Greenstein ~

(Mr.) Ludwiczak's house. We did as my father instructed and left the ghetto in the early afternoon of that same day.

When Pan Ludwiczak answered his door, I explained what my father had said. He welcomed me inside that afternoon, but in the morning he looked out the window and seeing no Nazis said, "Nothing will happen in the ghetto. You can go back home and join your parents now." And so I did as I was told. After all, I was an obedient child, only eleven years old. In the ghetto, I returned to the apartment, but my mother and father were horrified to see me.

"What are you doing here?" they yelled. "Run to Rachel, now!"

Again, I did as I was told, not knowing that this was to be my farewell to my parents and brother Mordchai. I never saw them again. As I ran off to find Rachel, I got stuck climbing over the ghetto link fence. A Nazi helped me over the fence thinking that I was a Polish child. (Perhaps an angel was watching over me in that moment.)

I found my way to Sergeant Koralek's house nearby. His wife let me in and took me to Rachel, who was hiding under the bed. I crawled under the bed with her where we huddled together until the next evening. That night, fearful that the Germans might search the house with their dogs, Mrs. Koralek sent us out to the outhouse until curfew was over. The next morning she told us to leave. She was afraid to keep us any longer. She instructed us, "Go to the other ghetto nearby, just out of town. My husband will come and warn you to leave that ghetto before it is liquidated."

Rachel and I took the train to the ghetto Parsow. After two weeks, the sergeant indeed warned us of the ghetto liquidation and Rachel and I were able to leave there the same day. We boarded a train, but when someone on the train asked Rachel what she was doing traveling with

~ Protected by Angels ~

a Jewish child, we quickly got off again. We walked together to my sister Tamara, who was working at the Karczew Labor Camp just outside Otwock. Tamara's husband, Marek Asch, was in charge of camp administration, and my brother Itzhak was a laborer in the camp. They took me in and hid me in one of the upper bunks where my brother slept and Rachel left on her own. The camp held 400 men and two women who worked in the kitchen. Inspections inside the bunks by Nazi soldiers were irregular, but one day the Nazis came in with their dogs to inspect while I was hiding, curled up in the far corner of the upper bunk under a blanket. The guard dog put his paws up onto the second level bunk bed but didn't bark. (Again my guardian angel was with me and again saved my life.)

The Jewish leader of the camp said, "Next time they'll kill you and me for allowing you to stay here. You have to leave now."

And so my wandering continued, but now I was entirely on my own.

I set off from the labor camp wearing the only shoes I had, a pair of wooden shoes that clicked as I walked. I was lucky to have a good winter coat, a hand-me-down from my sister. My long braids fell over my shoulders down the front because I was still a young girl. As I wandered, many people turned me away. But some strangers took me in, some for a night, some for a day, often without offering me any food. Then, fearful for their own lives, they shooed me out, and I wandered on.

My father had taught me to think through my problems and my mind was quick. I was a "smart cookie." I paid attention. I remembered things, and I drew on that information. Tamara had told me if I had nowhere to go, I should try to find her. She knew the labor camp would soon be liquidated and that she, her husband, Marek, and my brother Itzhak would go into hiding if they could escape. She told

~ Dorothy Greenstein ~

me about Mr. Osuch, a Polish farmer they knew, who had built a second cellar under his house and had offered to hide them there. I had stored the address she had spoken about in the back of my mind, and now I recalled the street number and went looking for her.

When I found the house Tamara had described, it was still daytime and I didn't want to attract any attention, so I waited until dusk (hiding under the leaves of a rhubarb plant in the garden patch) before knocking on the door. Tamara, Marek, and Itzchak were there hiding underground in the specially constructed second cellar, and I was taken down to see them when it was dark.

Tamara and I stayed up throughout the night, whispering to each other so that our voices wouldn't carry through the little underground vent into the night air. "By rights," she whispered, "because you're the youngest in the family, we should take care of you." Instead, she said, she would give me two and a half zlotys (about 25 dollars today). She instructed me to go to the church in our town to the record keeper whom we knew. "Ask her," she continued, "to give you a birth certificate from a Polish child. Then go to Warsaw, buy a newspaper, look in the Want Ads section for a position as a mother's helper, and go for a job." In this way, I'd be in the crowded, anonymous, and impersonal city of Warsaw, where I could better blend in. It would be safer for me, and I would be able to look after myself.

I walked to the parish church recorder in our town. Pani Maleszewska knew me but she would not help me. Instead she told me to go to Pruszkow, a smaller community. She told me to go to the cemetery and find a tombstone of a child who had died but would have been about my age. She said, "Memorize her name and birth date, then go to the community record keeper and request a copy of her birth certificate." So I did as she said and it worked! Now, with my new identity in hand, I made my way by train to Warsaw as Zofia

~ Protected by Angels ~

Leszczinska. I purchased a newspaper with one of my coins and read through the Want Ads section, quickly finding an advertisement for a mother's helper.

With newspaper in hand, I walked to the address listed in the paper. Once at the door I composed myself, stood up as tall as my young body would extend, tossed my long braids behind my back to hopefully make me look older, then rapped on the door with as much confidence as I could muster. The lady of the house opened the door and looked me up and down.

"I've come for the job as a mother's helper," I said, looking up at her.

"But you won't be able to do the work," the woman replied. "You're just a child."

"I will work for free for one month. After that, if you aren't satisfied with my work, I will leave." She accepted my proposition and I had a job, food, and a roof over my head.

These arrangements worked out fairly well for the first couple of weeks, though I had never cleaned, darned, ironed, cooked, polished, or patched clothing in my life. All I knew how to do was polish shoes. We had had our own maids for these tasks in my family home. But I learned quickly and was doing fine until one day about two weeks later, the lady returned home earlier than usual. She approached me as I was cleaning the windows and asked, "Zofia, are you Jewish?"

I was caught off guard but composed myself. "I am Polish," I said to her. "I can show you my papers." With that, I went into the kitchen for my coat and took my birth certificate from my coat pocket to show her. "My birth is recorded in the church registry in Pruszkow, and if you go there, you will see I am registered." But the question

~ Dorothy Greenstein ~

really scared me and I was so worried that I couldn't sleep that night. The next morning I fed the children breakfast and, once everyone was gone, quickly made all the beds and cleaned up the apartment so as not to leave a bad impression, and then I left, not wanting to further endanger myself.

Back out on the streets of Warsaw, I purchased a newspaper and looked through the Want Ads for another request for a mother's helper. This time the address was in the newer section of Warsaw, the penthouse apartment of an eight-story building. I made my way up the eight flights of stairs. Again I stood before the front door, composed myself, stood as tall as I could, tossed my braids to the back, and knocked on the door. When the lady of the house answered the door and looked me up and down just as the first lady had done, I was experienced with my response.

"My name is Zofia Leszczinska," I said. "I've come for the job as a mother's helper. I will work for a month without pay if you will take me in." And she took me in.

Pani (Mrs.) Doctor, as I called her, was a gynecologist. Her husband was a journalist, and they had two children, Charlie, fourteen, and Eva, seven. I worked for Pani Doctor for two years from the fall of 1942 until the Warsaw Uprising in the fall of 1944. Though she never paid me for my work, she was good to me, providing food and a roof over my head.

Through my weeks of wandering, my constant fear was that my Jewish identity would be discovered. Despite having had secured a Polish birth certificate identifying me as Zofia Leszczinska and having a new job and a place to live, this fear continued to haunt me. I constantly thought about the "Jewish" traits that might give me away. As a young child I only knew a couple of habitual customs

~ Protected by Angels ~

distinguishing Jews from Poles. Hand washing was an important part of daily ritual in Jewish homes. Therefore, I was very careful of where and when I washed my hands and of who might see me doing this. In my mind, it was a small but telling custom that could have revealed my true identity and cost me my life.

I had also gone to public school, where religion was taught to all the students. For our religious classes, which were held once a week, we were divided by faith, with Jewish boys and girls studying Judaism in one class and Catholic boys and girls studying Catholicism in another. When the Catholic children had their class, the Jewish children were sent out to play in the yard. I was an inquisitive child and quickly tired of playing outdoors. Instead (with permission from my father), I would sit with the Catholic children and learn about Catholicism and how to recite the catechism. This too proved to be life saving during the war years.

I spoke Polish very well, I had blonde braids and blue eyes, I had a birth certificate identifying me as Zofia Leszczinska, a Polish girl born in Pruszkow within a few months of my real birthday, I knew how to recite the catechism, and I was very conscientious about where and when I washed my hands. Still my daily fear was that I'd be discovered to be a Jewish girl.

While working for Pani Doctor, I slept in the kitchen because the sleeping quarter designated for household help was a small closet without windows. It was so confining that I asked to move my bed into the kitchen. It was while sleeping there that I had the dream about my father. In the dream I saw my father though I couldn't see his face, which was covered by a beautiful prayer shawl with a silver tiara. I didn't yet know that he had been burned in Treblinka, and when I recognized him in my dream, I cried out to him. "Daddy, I don't want to be here. I am scared. Please take me with you."

~ Dorothy Greenstein ~

He responded to me. “My child, I can’t take you. But, I’ll protect you – whenever you are in danger, I will save you.” I cried, begging him in Yiddish to take me with him and then screamed as he moved away from me out of my grasp. This was the moment when Pani Doctor rushed in to the kitchen to see why I was screaming.

Pani Doctor shook me from my sleep and said, “Why are you screaming so?”

I was scared that she might have known that I was speaking to my father in Yiddish in my dream. If she recognized this then she would also know that I was a Jewish girl. Now alert and awake I asked her, “Did you understand what I said?” When she said no, she didn’t understand, I was relieved that my secret remained safe for another day.

The Jewish Warsaw Ghetto Uprising took place in April 1943. It had been a heroic effort by the poorly armed and starving Jewish youth remaining in the ghetto to fight back against the Nazis. Ultimately the ghetto was destroyed and those who hadn’t escaped were either killed on the spot or sent to death camps. But the uprising was inspirational to the Poles, who in the fall of 1944 also took up arms against the Nazis. And this uprising, known as the Warsaw Uprising, played out in the neighborhood where I worked for Pani Doctor.

Pani Doctor’s husband was a journalist and was instrumental in warning the Poles when to start the revolt. However, a Polish person informed on him and gave his address to the Nazis. A couple of days before the start of the uprising, the Nazis came to the apartment and arrested him. He never returned home.

The uprising of the Poles lasted 63 days before the Nazis finally completely put it down and ordered all residents of the area out



~ Protected by Angels ~

of their homes and onto a Death March. We were prohibited from carrying any parcels with us as we marched out of the city along the highway. Pani Doctor, her father-in-law (who I referred to as “the big rancher” since he’d owned a big ranch before it had been confiscated by the Nazis), Eva (now nine), Charlie (now sixteen), and I (now thirteen) were among those ordered out of the apartment at night to join the Death March. The curfew was still in force so other Polish people could not come out to aid us. We were ordered to march out of the city, but we didn’t know to where.

After walking along the highway in the dark and cold for several hours, carefully stepping over those who’d fallen and being careful not to fall down ourselves, Pani Doctor noticed a neon sign for a hospital. She told us to quietly step out of the line and crawl over the grassy hill on the side of the road so we could make our way toward the hospital. We reached it in the middle of the night, cold, tired, and hungry.

“I am a doctor in Warsaw and have been driven out of the city with my father and three children because of the uprising,” Pani Doctor told the nuns when they opened the emergency door to the hospital and welcomed us to come inside. The nuns were aware of the uprising and neither Eva nor Charlie corrected their mother’s story indicating that I too was her child and that her father was actually her father-in-law. Polish people helped other Polish people (and another angel aided me that night). The nuns took us in. They fed us, gave us a place to sleep on the floor in the hallway, and in the morning gave Pani Doctor some money so that we could take the train to Krakow, where we could get further assistance.

The farmers market in the old town square of Krakow had been set up to help refugees coming into the city. I had been coughing very badly and was told that I had bronchitis. I went to see a doctor

~ Dorothy Greenstein ~

there who gave me a gamma globulin shot and told me to return for additional shots until I recovered. Pani Doctor decided to continue on and stay in a rural community out of town with her family, so we parted ways and I got another job in Krakow.

When the war ended in January of 1945, I was still in Krakow, far from Warsaw, and I didn't know if any of my family had survived. I had just turned fourteen. I had no money, and no way to get back to Warsaw. Desperate for information about my family, I wrote a letter to Pani Kobus, a Polish woman who was a tenant in our building in Otwock. I told her where I was living in Krakow. I asked her if she would please pass on this information to any of my family should she know where they were. As it happened, sometime after she received my letter, she was looking out her front window at the very moment that my brother Itzhak was walking in front of the building. He was planning to emigrate to British Mandate Palestine and wanted to say goodbye to his childhood home before leaving. In this fortuitous moment (when once again angels were by my side), Pani Kobus was able to tell my brother of my survival and give him my letter and address in Krakow. Six months after the end of the war, my sister Tamara showed up at the home in Krakow where I was working. She had come to take me home. "Take your things," she said. "I am taking you back to Warsaw immediately." To the dissatisfaction of my employer, I left without giving her notice, and she made a comment that I have never forgotten: "Only the race from the east would do this." She now understood that I was Jewish. And with that abrupt goodbye, my sister took me home to Warsaw.

Even with the end of the war, Poland was not a safe place for Jews. My parents and brother had been murdered in Treblinka, and I was now under the care of Tamara and her husband, Marek. Together we made our way to a DP (displaced persons) camp in the American zone of Germany. I lived there for three and a half years, attending school,

~ Protected by Angels ~



Dvorah Kirszenbaum (Dorothy Greenstein)

where I learned six languages and studied piano. I came to Toronto, Canada, on the last transport of children out of Germany when I was seventeen. In Toronto, I met my husband, Alan Greenstein, whom I'd briefly known in the DP camp in Germany. We were married in Toronto on March 20, 1949. Our daughter, Gloria Elaine (named for my mother and Alan's mother), was born in 1953, and our son, Joseph Joshua (named for Alan's father and my father), was born in 1956. In 1963 we left the winter cold of Toronto to move to Los Angeles, where Alan and I continue to live today.

Story written by Jan Berlfein Burns  
as told by Dorothy Greenstein

~ Dorothy Greenstein ~

In Memory of the  
Dvorah Kirszenbaum (Dorothy Greenstein) Family

Rabbi Yehoshua Kirszenbaum ז"ל – father  
Golda Goldberg Kirszenbaum ז"ל – mother  
Rabbi Mordchai Kirszenbaum ז"ל – brother  
Sarah Kirszenbaum ז"ל – sister  
Naomi Kirszenbaum ז"ל – sister

and many more aunts, uncles, and cousins who died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide



Kirszenbaum Family  
Dvorah (Dorothy Greenstein) (front left)  
Otwock, Poland  
1934

~ Protected by Angels ~

### Survivors

Dorothy Kirszenbaum Greenstein and Allen Greenstein

Itzhak Kirszenbaum **י"ד** – brother

Leah Kirszenbaum Erlichster **י"ד** – sister

Malke Kirszenbaum Kostrynski **י"ד** – sister

Rachel Kirszenbaum Ausenberg **י"ד** – sister

Tamara Kirszenbaum Asch **י"ד** – sister

Marek Asch **י"ד** – brother-in-law

### The Next Generation

CHILDREN  
(and spouses)

Gloria Esther and David Eiseman

Joseph Joshua and Leesa Greenstein

GRANDCHILDREN  
(and spouse)

Elisheva (Lisa) Eiseman and Rabbi Harry Pell

Nataniel (Nate) Eiseman

Johnathan, Jeffrey, Daniel, and Heather Greenstein

GREAT GRANDCHILDREN

Eliana and Nachum Pell



David and Gloria Eiseman



Joseph and Dorothy Greenstein

## Erika Jacoby's Story



The Engel Family  
Malvina, Jenő, Moshu, Zoli, and Erika (Jacoby)  
Miskolc, Hungary  
1932

## ~ WHEN THE WAR WAS OVER ~

The war was over. My mother and I had survived together. We had survived concentration camps, labor camps, horrors, and deprivations beyond imagination, but we had survived. It took us several weeks to return home from Langenbielau, Germany, where we had been liberated by the Russians on May 8, 1945. On the trains we traveled in circles and all different directions until we finally arrived at the depot in our town of Miskolc, Hungary. My brother Zoltan (Zoli) was at the train station when we arrived. How did he know we had survived? How did he know we would be returning? How did he know to come to the train station on that day? He explained that survivors who had returned to our town came to the train station every day hoping and praying that someone from their family would return. On that day we were blessed to be reunited with him. After ours, there were no more joyous family reunions at the train station. No one else from our family would return. Not my father, not my little brother, Moshu, not my grandparents.

Yes, the war was over and we had safely returned to our hometown, but aside from my brother and the other Jewish survivors who waited day after day at the train station, we weren't welcomed back into our community. Our neighbors had moved into our home and had taken over all of our possessions. When we finally got them to move out, they took our furniture with them, claiming that it now belonged to them.

It hadn't always been this way. I was born in Miskolc, Hungary, as were my older brother, Zoli, and my younger brother, Moshu. My parents, Jenő and Malvina Engel, owned a kosher restaurant which they had opened after my father's textile business failed during the depression. The restaurant kept my parents very busy and they had little time for me. I was lovingly raised by our maid, Mari, the daughter

~ Erika Jacoby ~



Erika Engel (Jacoby) plucking chickens  
with cook's daughter, Mari

of our cook. Mari was like an older sister. I loved to tag along after her, helping her with her daily tasks. When my father would come home with baskets full of live chickens purchased for the restaurant, Mari and I would take them to the shochet (slaughterer) to be killed according to ritual law. Then we would sit in our courtyard plucking chicken feathers all afternoon in preparation for dinner customers.

When war broke out in Europe in September 1939, our daily life in Hungary did not change much. Hungary had allied with Germany and was pretty much left alone until 1942, when we began to suffer under restrictions that had long been imposed on the German-dominated countries surrounding us. I was not able to continue my education following my graduation from the Jewish Middle School in Miskolc, which was closed the year I turned fourteen. I had loved school. As a young teenager, I was absorbed in my own world both at school



Erika Engel (Jacoby) with grandfather  
Josef Salamonovics and cousins

and at home. I was not fully attuned to the concerns of my parents or the world at large. That changed, however, on March 19, 1944, when the Germans invaded Hungary and began deporting Jews to “the east,” though we didn’t know what that meant at the time.

My wartime story is not insignificant. I have written about it in a memoir called *I Held the Sun in My Hands*. The anguish and suffering of the war years is often the primary story



~ When the War Was Over ~

told by holocaust survivors, as though once the war was over we all went back home to resume our lives where we had left off. This was not the case for me. And so my story resumes after the war.

Shortly after my mother and I were liberated from the labor camp in Langenbielau, Germany, and returned home to Miskolc, my mother reopened our restaurant. We tried to pick up the pieces of our shattered lives. Our restaurant enterprise was short-lived. We learned that a couple of other survivors had been beaten to death and their bodies dragged through the streets behind a horse-drawn cart for all to see as a warning to others. Their misdeed, aside from being Jews, was trading on the black market at a time when lack of food and commerce necessitated such acts for survival. With this incident my mother decided that we would be safer in a larger community, and so we moved to Budapest, where she had two sisters who had also survived the war.

My mother had come from a family of twelve siblings. Three of her brothers had emigrated to Mexico before the war and done quite well there. When the war ended, they were anxious to get the rest of their family out of Europe to join them in Mexico. My mother applied for the necessary visas, but we had no idea how long it would take to get them.

In the meantime, I was invited to attend a summer camp for Jewish teens, many of them orphaned by the war. Bnei Akiva was a religious Zionist youth organization offering a summer camping program in the mountains near Miskolc. I eagerly wanted to go, but my mother was still reluctant to let me out of her sight. Eventually, with the help of my brother Zoli, we convinced her to let me go.

Attending Camp Moshava gave me a chance to be a real teenager, to be among others my own age, to camp out, swim, and hike in the

~ Erika Jacoby ~

clean mountain air. We gathered around the campfire to dance, sing songs, and engage in intellectual discussions. As survivors, we tried to come to grips with why we had survived when so many others had not. What obligations did we now carry? Not only did I have guilt about my own survival, but I had guilt that my mother survived. I still had a mother, while most of the campers were orphaned.

My mother's and my survival had hinged on each other, and conscious or not, we both recognized this. She was my reason to live and I was hers. But the instinct to survive in the camps could have also gotten us killed. Our need to live for the other, to protect the other, could have been our demise. The killings were senseless. We were directed to go to the right or to the left, we were too young or too old, we looked strong or looked weak. These moments were the difference between life and death, and my mother and I had passed through each together and had survived together. (In Auschwitz, as we passed for inspection before Dr. Mengele, I hit my mother on the back, startling her but also causing her to stand up straight and look stronger. Miraculously, we both passed the "Angel of Death" and were sent to the right and to a labor camp, rather than to the left to the gas chamber.)

So at the end of the war, I was not only a survivor but also a child of a survivor, with all the emotional and psychological complexity held by each of these roles.

I embraced the "child of a survivor" identity over the identity of being a survivor myself. My wartime experiences, the concentration camps, the labor camps, the deprivations, starvation, brutality, constant fear of what would happen next – hadn't destroyed me emotionally. I was young, naïve, and still believed in the coming of the Messiah. I looked forward to life in spite of all I had been through. My mother saw darkness looming around every corner. Understandably, she had

~ When the War Was Over ~

a great fear of being separated from me.

As I grappled with these issues, I was grateful to have a place to express my conflicted feelings. My summer camp experience was pivotal. While my education had been cut short by the war, my involvement with the Zionist Youth Movement gave purpose to my life. By the second summer after the war, I had become a youth leader and a junior counselor to a group of young girls orphaned by the war. I learned about the history of the Aliyot, the waves of immigration to Palestine, legal and illegal; about the development of the kibbutz movement; about the “ideal Jew,” who would work for the land and at the same time study and live by the precepts of the Torah. The camp program now included training for what they called “an illegal landing in Palestine.” We learned to fight and defend ourselves with clubs and to climb ropes that stretched over deep ditches and water to simulate real landings.

I also met my future husband, Emil Jakubovics, aka Uziel Menachem, the identity he used as a member of the underground during the war. He was one of the camp directors.

During these couple of years following the war while I was growing more deeply involved in the Zionist movement, studying Hebrew and trying to get Uzi to pay some attention to me at camp, my mother was waiting for our visas to come through from Mexico. My brother and the other surviving family members were expected to move to Mexico with her, and of course I was to go, too.

But now I had a new dream, and that dream was to go to Palestine with Uzi to help with the establishment of the state of Israel. As much as I dreamed of Uzi and Palestine, I knew that I couldn’t leave my mother. When our visas finally came through, assuring us entrance into Cuba (where we would continue to wait for our Mexican visas),

~ Erika Jacoby ~

Uzi and I got engaged with the hope that we would be united in marriage sometime and somewhere in the near future.



In December 1947, I boarded the Queen Mary sailing from England to New York. On board with me were the nine surviving members of my mother's family – my mother, my brother Zoli, my mother's brother and his wife, my mother's sister, and three of her children plus one child recently orphaned by the death of another of my mother's sisters. Everyone except for my mother, brother, and me had Mexican visas. We would be detoured to Cuba indefinitely while we waited for our Mexican visas to be processed.

Havana, Cuba, with its palm trees, warm sunshine, and colorful Latin culture, was a world away from the ruins of war-torn Europe. How would we fit into this new world as Jewish Hungarian refugees? The truth was that we wouldn't fit in. But to be inventive was to be a survivor and so we became inventive.

With our visitor visas, legally we weren't allowed to work in Cuba, but we each did our part to earn something extra to help supplement the money sent to us by my uncles. My brother worked on a farm and brought eggs into town for my mother to sell. She carried her little basket full of eggs through the streets of Havana, selling them to people in the apartment buildings in our neighborhood. For my part, I made up a Spanish course for the new refugees, who were arriving in greater numbers every day. I bought a book, studied it for a few days, then taught them everything I knew. The course lasted for three months, because that was all I knew by then. Then I made up a course on the Hebrew language and taught it to a group of Hadassah

~ When the War Was Over ~

women. My next challenge was to tutor the children of the rabbi who were studying the Torah, but the rabbi wanted me to translate the Hebrew into Yiddish. I did not speak Yiddish well, so the night before the lesson, a young man who spoke Yiddish fluently instructed me about the lesson for the following day. Since I had no money to pay him, I agreed to teach him all the English I learned from a woman in our building. I had also taught the woman exercises to strengthen her back. And that was how we created a semblance of a community. We helped each other with what we knew with a give and take that encouraged our ingenuity and inventiveness. In spite of this, I did not want to stay in Cuba.



Erika Engel (Jacoby)  
Havana, Cuba  
circa 1948

Uzi and I continued to correspond weekly by mail (no telephone service) for two years. After repeated attempts to convince my mother to let me go to Israel with him, Uzi came to the United States on a student visa. He had been accepted as a student into the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, and I made up my mind that I would get into the United States no matter how.

I learned from Itzik, the young man who had taught me Yiddish in exchange for English lessons, that he knew of a U.S. Air Force pilot who would smuggle people into the U.S. for \$1,000. Itzik was planning on hiring the pilot and, knowing of my desire to reunite with Uzi, invited me to come along. Somehow I convinced my mother to go along with the scheme, and she helped to raise the money I needed. Between her meager earnings from the sale of eggs, money put aside from my uncle's assistance, and whatever I was able to contribute, I now had enough money to pay the smuggler's fee and go to America. The next step of my adventure began with a tearful goodbye to

~ Erika Jacoby ~

my mother and brother as I boarded a bus with Itzik following instructions for our clandestine departure. I wore the same checkered traveling suit I had worn when I left Hungary two years earlier. I carried a toothbrush, my purse, and \$1,000 that my mother had pinned inside my bra. As we lay prone in the middle of a sugar cane field somewhere in the interior of the island, waiting and watching, we saw the plane that was to take us to America fly over the field and off into the night sky without landing to pick us up. For some reason unbeknownst to us, our flight from Cuba was aborted on that first night. The following night we repeated the routine. I lay on the ground shivering in my checkered suit, looking up into the stars in the vast night sky, thinking that those were the same stars I had watched from my window back home in Miskolc when I was a child, the very same constellations that covered the sky in Auschwitz. How could it be, I wondered, that way up high everything was the same, everything was in order; but down here on earth, everything was so different, so complicated, and disordered?

This time the plane was able to land and we ran toward the flares, stumbling through the field of sugarcane as we approached the plane. We quickly boarded the four-seater, and the pilot, a handsome blond-haired man in a U.S. Air Force uniform, with a gun in his holster and an easygoing grin on his face, ushered us into our seats. To my great embarrassment, once we were airborne I threw up. The combination of motion sickness, tension, and anxiety had finally gotten the best of me. Thankfully, the airplane was equipped with a little bag just for such emergencies.

After a bumpy ride, much circling, and the light of dawn, we landed on an airfield somewhere in Florida and were met by the pilot's wife, who quickly escorted us to her waiting car. I glanced back to see a sign that read "United States of America, Air Force Base." The pilot's wife drove us to their bungalow on the Air Force base and had

~ When the War Was Over ~

us wait in the bathroom while the pilot changed from his uniform into civilian clothes. He then came to us for his payment. I had to ask the men to leave the room so that I could retrieve the \$1,000 from my bra. This was all the money I had, and now I was an illegal alien on a U.S. Air Force base somewhere in Florida.

The pilot generously paid for my airline ticket to New York and gave me some money for cab fare. Later that evening, Itzik and I boarded an Eastern Airlines plane for New York. We arrived in New York at five a.m. I shared a cab with my fellow refugee and was dropped off at the address I carried for my Kramer cousins on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Needless to say, my cousin Ethel was taken aback when she answered the door early that October morning and saw me standing there, a bit ruffled, in my checkered traveling suit. As tired as I was from the buildup, the tension, and the danger of my illegal entrance into the United States, I had made it “no matter how,” and I was anxious to be reunited with Uzi.



Emil (Uzi) Jacoby

Uzi had no idea that I would be coming to the U.S. Now that I was here, I wanted to surprise him. Going along with my wishes, my cousins invited him to come over on Saturday night without letting on about my arrival. That evening I walked to the subway stop so I could meet him as he climbed the stairs up from the station. It had been two years since we had become engaged in Hungary.

I had spent those years as a Jewish Hungarian refugee in sun-drenched Havana, learning English, teaching English, learning Spanish, teaching Spanish, learning Yiddish, teaching Hebrew, surviving. It was time to move on. Uzi and I had kept our relationship alive with our weekly letters.



Erika Engel (Jacoby)

~ Erika Jacoby ~

Now I had to find out if this relationship was for keeps. I stood to the side of the subway exit and saw him come up the stairs and turn to the right. I stepped behind him, tapped him on the shoulder, and said, softly, “Shalom, Uzi.”

He turned around and stared at me, speechless, his expression puzzled, confused. He finally said, “But how did you get here and when? How? Tell me!”

Only after he recovered from the shock did we embrace, and then we looked at each other and touched each other to see if this was real or a mirage. People were rushing by us, glancing at us as we obstructed their exit. We stood there not wanting the reunion to end. But reluctantly the cold weather got to us and we headed to my cousin’s heated apartment and warm welcome.



Emil (Uzi) and Erika Jacoby  
Valley Village, California, 2013

Uzi and I married in New York on September 24, 1950. We have been married for sixty-three years. My mother lived for many years in Mexico with her brothers. In 1957 she moved to be with us in California, where she lived until the age of ninety-seven. Uzi and I have three sons. In 1978 we returned to Auschwitz with our boys. I had to see the place again to make sure that it was real, that it had really existed.

Story written by Jan Berlfein Burns  
with excerpts from *I Held the Sun in My Hands* by Erika Jacoby





~ Erika Jacoby ~

In Memory of the  
Erika Engel (Jacoby) Family

Yakov Koppel (Jenö) י"ק – father  
Moshu (Tibor) מ"ש – brother

and more than fifty aunts, uncles, and cousins who died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide



Salamonovics Family Wedding  
Erika Engel (Jacoby) (front row, second from right)  
Edelény, Hungary  
1936

~ When the War Was Over ~

### Survivors

Erika Engel Jacoby and Emil (Uzi) Jacoby  
Malvina (Miriam) Salamonovics Engel ז"ל – mother  
Zoltan (Yitzchak) – brother

### The Next Generation

CHILDREN  
(and spouses)

Jonathan and Donna Jacoby  
Benjamin and Etta Jacoby  
Michael and Cary Jacoby

### GRANDCHILDREN

Jesse, Joshua, Shalom Tzvi, Shaina, Doovie,  
Yaakov, Simcha, Ariel, Ben, and Yael



Jacoby Family Reunion, 1998



## Epilogue

While working on this book, I have been asked if I've lost family members to the Holocaust. Well, yes, but not direct family members, and I didn't even know this until I was married with a young child of my own. My father's parents came to America through Ellis Island from the then Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1911 and 1912, years just preceding World War I. My paternal grandmother, Rose Stern, was just twelve years old when she was sent from the shtetl of Nowotaneic in Poland with her sister Ida to pave the way to America. The rest of the family would follow later.

My paternal grandfather, Jacob Berlfein, came from Stary Sambor in Ukraine and followed his older brother Sam to America. He traveled using the passport of another brother Zalman, who had changed his mind at the last moment. My grandfather met my grandmother in a boarding house on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York, and they married in 1916. Together they saved money and sent it back to my grandmother's family, enabling her parents, two brothers, and five sisters to come to America in 1920.

And what of my grandfather's family? His parents, sister, and brothers remained in Eastern Europe. I've always been curious about my family history, and as a young girl I used to ask my father, "What do you know about Grandpa Jack's family?"

My father, generally a happy-go-lucky kind of guy, would curtly reply, "Hitler took care of all of them."

This was what we had believed, until 1988, when my father received an intriguing message on his telephone answering machine.

The message came from a woman named Eva Florsheim, and she

~ March of the Living - Our Stories ~

was calling from Israel. Eva had recently purchased a secondhand book titled *Self Chosen: "Our Crowd" Is Dead – Long Live "Our Crowd,"* by Jean Baer. The book was about the Jews of Los Angeles, and she had picked it up because she was interested in doing some research on her own family roots. Looking through the index of the book, she came across the name Harold Berlfein and recalled that Berlfein was the maiden name of her friend Genia Youngerman, a Holocaust survivor from Ukraine and an early postwar settler to Israel. With great excitement, Eva showed the book to Genia, the sole survivor of her family. Genia reserved her enthusiasm. She wasn't sure she was related to this Berlfein family in Los Angeles. But she gave Eva her consent to look up a phone number and make the call to Los Angeles to inquire.

My father, having picked up the message from his answering machine, immediately spared no expense on a long distance, international phone call back to Israel. Thus began a lengthy correspondence between Genia and my father (with Eva acting as translator), trying to determine if indeed they were related. Neither side would be



Harold Mattes Berlfein

totally convinced in spite of the fact that they both had a grandfather named Hersh Mattes Berlfein. Finally my father asked his uncle (from his mother's side), who was visiting Israel, to meet with Genia in person. Genia arrived at the appointed hotel lobby where the meeting was to take place. She was accompanied by her husband and several of her children. She held in her hand the only scrap of evidence she had of possible remaining family. After the war she had briefly corresponded with an uncle in America but had lost that connection when he died in the 1950s. However, that uncle had sent her a photograph of his son in army uniform. This is the photo she showed my father's uncle, who proclaimed with great delight that the soldier in the photograph was

~ Epilogue ~

my father. Genia and my father were first cousins! She was the only survivor from my grandfather's family, the family that my father had always given up for dead.

Genia had gone east from Ukraine into Russia during the war, and this had saved her life. She returned home to find that no one else had survived, most having been killed by the mobile death squads. After the war, she married Pinchas Youngerman, a survivor who was an officer in the Polish Army. The end of the war did not bring with it the end of anti-Semitism in Poland. Learning of continued atrocities perpetrated upon the Jews by the Polish Army, Pinchas removed his uniform and deserted the army. He and Genia made their way out of Poland and eventually walked over the Alps into Italy, where Genia gave birth to twins (only one survived) in a DP camp. They were on one of the first boats to Israel, where they settled on a Moshav and raised a family, with two more daughters and a son to follow. By the time Genia and my father finally met in person in 1989, Genia and Pinchas had many grandchildren, too.

Our extended families have remained in touch, visiting back and forth between Israel and the U.S. I have learned a little more about my lost family and about how the Holocaust is a part of my own family history, whether I was aware of it or not. Whether we were directly touched by these horrors as survivors or have only heard their stories, we are now all witnesses and have an obligation to remember and to retell their stories again and again, from generation to generation.



Jan Berlfein Burns  
Los Angeles, California  
April 2014

~ March of the Living - Our Stories ~

## In Memory of the Genia Berlfein Youngerman Family

Jehuda Berlfein ל"ט – father  
Rachel Berlfein ל"ט – stepmother  
Fanka Berlfein ל"ט – sister  
Chana Berlfein ל"ט – sister  
Dortzia Berlfein ל"ט – sister  
Rechcie Berlfein Isserles ל"ט – sister  
Henia Berlfein ל"ט – sister  
Etel Berlfein ל"ט – sister  
Sara Friedman ל"ט – aunt  
Zalman Berlfein ל"ט – uncle

and many more aunts, uncles, and cousins who died as  
a result of the Nazi genocide



Zalman Berlfein (right)



~ Epilogue ~

## Survivors

Genia Berlfein Youngerman ל"י and Pinchas Youngerman ל"י

## The Next Generation

CHILDREN  
(and spouses)

Esther and Andrew Bryson

Yona and Shlomo Prital

Jehudith Youngerman Silver

Kobi Youngerman ל"י

## GRANDCHILDREN

Alexander Bryson

Noga, Ofra, Yadin, and Idith Prital

Iftach, Jonatan, Yael, Michal, and Tal Silver

Anna Youngerman



Youngerman Family



## **Afterword**

I am grateful to Jan Burns, editor and author of this precious book, for her love of the written word and the printed page and for sharing these poignant and powerful life stories with you. This book is an act of hope that books themselves, with their words and ideas, have the ability to travel hand to hand, heart to heart, grandparent to grandchild, parent to child, child to child's child.

I am also grateful to you, the holders and readers of this book. Here are the stories of your elders, which now are your stories, too. Hold them close and know that you are not alone with this history but in community with it. You and I will take these stories in and carry them through the world with us. In some moments, their full weight will be deeply felt. In other moments, we will carry them lightly. We will use them to fuel the pilot light of our hearts, our moral conscience, and our care for the world.

Let us all return to these stories and let their nascent strength and courage shape a more humane, respectful, and dignified world.

Samara Hutman  
Executive Director  
Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust



## **Author's Notes**

From time to time over the course of creating this book – establishing the concept, interviewing survivors, and meeting other family members – I learned of anecdotal details that didn't always fit into the context of the stories printed in this book. But many of these bits and pieces of information were interesting and worthy as ancillary notes to the greater stories.

Only those chapters in which I couldn't fit all known related details have additional notes here.

### **Notes to A Happy-Go-Lucky Kid ~ Sigi Hart's story**

My daughter, Katie, traveled to Poland and Israel with March of the Living in 2010. Upon her return, she shared powerful moments of the trip with me. I was trying to figure out a way to capture the essence of her journey so that she and other young delegates would be able to recapture the trip's meaning as they grew into adults.

Then I spoke to Maya Cohen, one of the BJE trip leaders who had taken this journey herself as a high school student several years before. Maya told me that her enduring memory was of the survivors and the stories they had shared with the delegates as they traveled together. She said, "If I had a book with Sigi Hart's story and the stories of the other survivors we traveled with, this would be the most meaningful memento I could have from my March of the Living experience." It was from Maya's comment and her desire to recollect Sigi Hart's story that the concept for this book was formed.

I never met Sigi, as he died a week before he was to travel to Poland

~ March of the Living - Our Stories ~

and Israel with the 2011 March of the Living delegates, which was before I began this project in earnest. However, he is remembered and beloved by all who knew him.

I did meet Sigi's sister Manya, but only after the first edition of this book had been published. (I was able to write about Sigi after viewing his Shoah Foundation testimony.) After Manya read Sigi's story, she provided further insight into their family saga. She said they were known as the "miracle family" because all five members of the family had miraculously survived the war. At the war's end, Manya was in the United States, her father, Herman, and brother Willy were in Italy, her mother, Adela, was in France, and Sigi was in Poland. All were alive, but it took years before they were all reunited.

pp. 11–12: Manya commented about Sigi's reference to her not wanting to leave in the middle of the night because she wanted to get a good night's sleep. What he didn't know was that as a teenager, Manya worked from six in the morning until 11 at night in a hotel in the French village of Aulus-les-Bains – washing dishes and cleaning rooms. Her payment came in the form of food, which she brought home to feed their family of five. She said, "Sigi would've starved without me and no wonder I was tired! But he was too young to be aware of what I was doing for the family."

According to Manya, in all the years following the war, Sigi and Manya never once discussed their wartime experiences with each another.

**Notes to Street Smarts and Common Sense ~ Sidonia Lax's story**

When my daughter, Katie, returned home from her journey with March of the Living in 2010, she was full of stories about the incredible survivors who had accompanied her on the trip. She had an enduring affection for Sidonia and was anxious for me to meet

~ Author's Notes ~

her. Sidonia invited Katie out to breakfast before Katie set off for her first year in college, and Katie asked me if I would come along. During our breakfast on the outside patio of a local restaurant, our conversation centered on Katie's upcoming college adventures, her March of the Living experience, and Sidonia's mentoring relationship to prior March of the Living delegates. As breakfast drew to an end, Sidonia turned to me and asked what I did for a living. When I explained to her that I produced photographic books for different events, she quickly asked if she could hire me to compile a book of photos from all her March of the Living trips. Sidonia's was the first book I produced about March of the Living, and this initiated my subsequent involvement.

When I traveled with the adult BJE March of the Living group in 2012, sixteen members of Sidonia's family were participants in our group of forty. They included her two daughters, Genie and Irene, two grandsons, Andrew and David, and other cousins (including one from Paris) and spouses.

Sidonia has been a part of March of the Living every year since 2007. Now well into her eighties, her grandson David has promised to accompany her each year that she continues to travel to Poland for the March.

**Notes to Nine Years Old ~ Paula Lebovics' story**

Paula arrived in Auschwitz on August 4, 1944. She was not quite eleven years old. The Germans abandoned the camp on January 18, 1945, leaving behind a handful of children and other prisoners including Paula. (Most prisoners were taken out on the Death March.) Even though all the guards and soldiers had left the camp, the children were afraid to move about because of the electric fences and barbed wire that divided the barracks. They had been huddling

~ March of the Living - Our Stories ~

in their bunks for several days without food when the Allies dropped bombs nearby. These bombs took out the electrical wires, and so the children were free to move around the camp without fear of being electrocuted. They were starving and freezing and could now head to the storerooms to rummage through the clothing and shoes that had piled up from the thousands of people who had been stripped of everything before being murdered in the gas chambers. One girl found a pair of boots among the discarded possessions. Paula wanted some boots, too. She was excited to find a pair of felt boots, even though the sizes were mismatched. In that moment, she realized that in spite of all she had been through, she was still a little girl and her spirit had not been broken.



Auschwitz, Poland

The Russians liberated Auschwitz on January 27, 1945. When they discovered the surviving children, they dressed them in the striped pajama tops that have come to symbolize concentration camp prisoners. The Russians documented the devastation in the camps by photographing what they found, including photos of Paula and the other children wearing the striped pajamas. These pajamas were not the clothes that the children had worn as prisoners.



~ Author's Notes ~

**Notes to Rescue in Europe ~ Emil (Uzi) Jacoby's story**

In the early days of the war, Hungarian Jewish boys and men were taken into the army and sent to labor camps. Rabbinical students could be exempt from army service, but they needed have a high school diploma to prove they were graduates.

These rabbinical students, though scholarly, didn't have a secular high school education and therefore couldn't produce a diploma to the testing board. Emil, while still in high school himself, grew a beard and pretended to be a rabbinical student on several occasions so that he could take the required test in the student's place. After successfully scoring high marks on the exams and receiving the valued high school diploma, he would deliver it to the rabbinical student whose identity he'd assumed. In this life-saving gesture, the students could now be exempted from army service.

p. 68: The physical skills required learning to fight with sticks, as they had no guns. They also practiced how to land a small boat in shallow water and wade through the sea as though approaching the Haifa shore in Palestine.



Lake Balaton, Hungary  
1945-1947

## ~ March of the Living - Our Stories ~

One night Emil devised a training exercise for the whole camp. In the middle of the night he woke up all the campers and counselors who were sleeping in tents and instructed them to pack all their gear quickly, get into boats, and make their way across Lake Balaton. These exercises were in preparation for the unknown demands of a move to Palestine.

### **Notes to Did Anyone Hold Her Hand? ~ Jack Adler's story**

Upon reading Jack's book, *Y: A Holocaust Narrative* (Jack Adler and co-author, W. E. Aspenwall, Mbedzi Publishing, 2012), I chose to highlight the story about his sister Peska and the part Jack played in her short life.

He later told me that when he returned to Poland in 2011, he finally found out what had happened to the "Group A" prisoners when they were taken away in trucks from the Pabianice ghetto. They were taken to Chelmno, Poland, where they were transferred to fully enclosed buses holding about 70 people each. Poison gas fumes were then piped into the buses, killing all inside. His grandmother was among those in Group A. He now reflects that it was a blessing in disguise that his grandfather died while still in the ghetto, thus sparing him this terror.

### **Notes to Protected by Angels ~ Dorothy Greenstein's story**

As a young child, Dorothy always wanted to become a concert pianist. Before the war, her father had promised her that he would buy her a piano once three of her sisters were married. (She had six sisters.) War intervened. In 1945, after the war, Dorothy finally learned to play the piano. But her dream to become a concert pianist was dashed when a Polish boy at school called her a "scabby Jew." She clenched her fists together to protect her fingers and then with

~ Author's Notes ~

all her might punched the boy in the nose with each fist. She broke his nose, but alas, she also broke her finger, the fourth finger, which was critical for playing the piano professionally. Her finger was never properly set and became permanently crooked. Though she could not play piano professionally, Dorothy did become a piano teacher and continues to teach piano to this day.

p. 135: When the ghetto in which Dorothy and her family were living was about to be liquidated, Dorothy's father instructed his daughters Sarah and Naomi to go to a Polish family who lived in their former apartment building. By 1943 the sisters were living in the Warsaw ghetto just before the uprising. A friend of the family had begged them to escape with him through the sewers, but they would not go. They were taken on the last transport out of the Warsaw ghetto to the Treblinka extermination camp. Her other sisters, who were hiding outside the ghetto, did survive the war.



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~ March of the Living - Our Stories ~

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Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust (LAMOTH) is the oldest Holocaust museum in the United States, founded in 1961 by local Holocaust survivors who found one another and shared their wartime experiences. They discovered that each had a photograph, a concentration camp uniform, or some other precious primary source object from the Holocaust era. These artifacts needed a permanent home where they could be displayed safely and in perpetuity, a place to memorialize the dead and a venue to educate the world and future generations.

In October 2013 LAMOTH merged with Remember Us and now provides off site programming in schools, synagogues, and community organizations throughout the city. Through these programs Holocaust survivors connect with teens and young adults, sharing their life stories, passing on the legacy of memory, and working in community on creative arts projects that address contemporary injustice. LAMOTH is open seven days a week and provides free Holocaust education to the public, particularly students from under-funded schools and underserved communities.

Many of the survivors whose stories appear in this book have given video testimony to the USC Shoah Foundation Institute. These testimonies can be viewed at Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust in the research room on the museum floor, open to the public, seven days a week.

~ March of the Living - Our Stories ~

Thank you to BJE and March of the Living International for the work they are doing to honor survivors, educate the next generation, and keep alive the memory of the six million Jews who died as a result of the Nazi genocide of World War II.

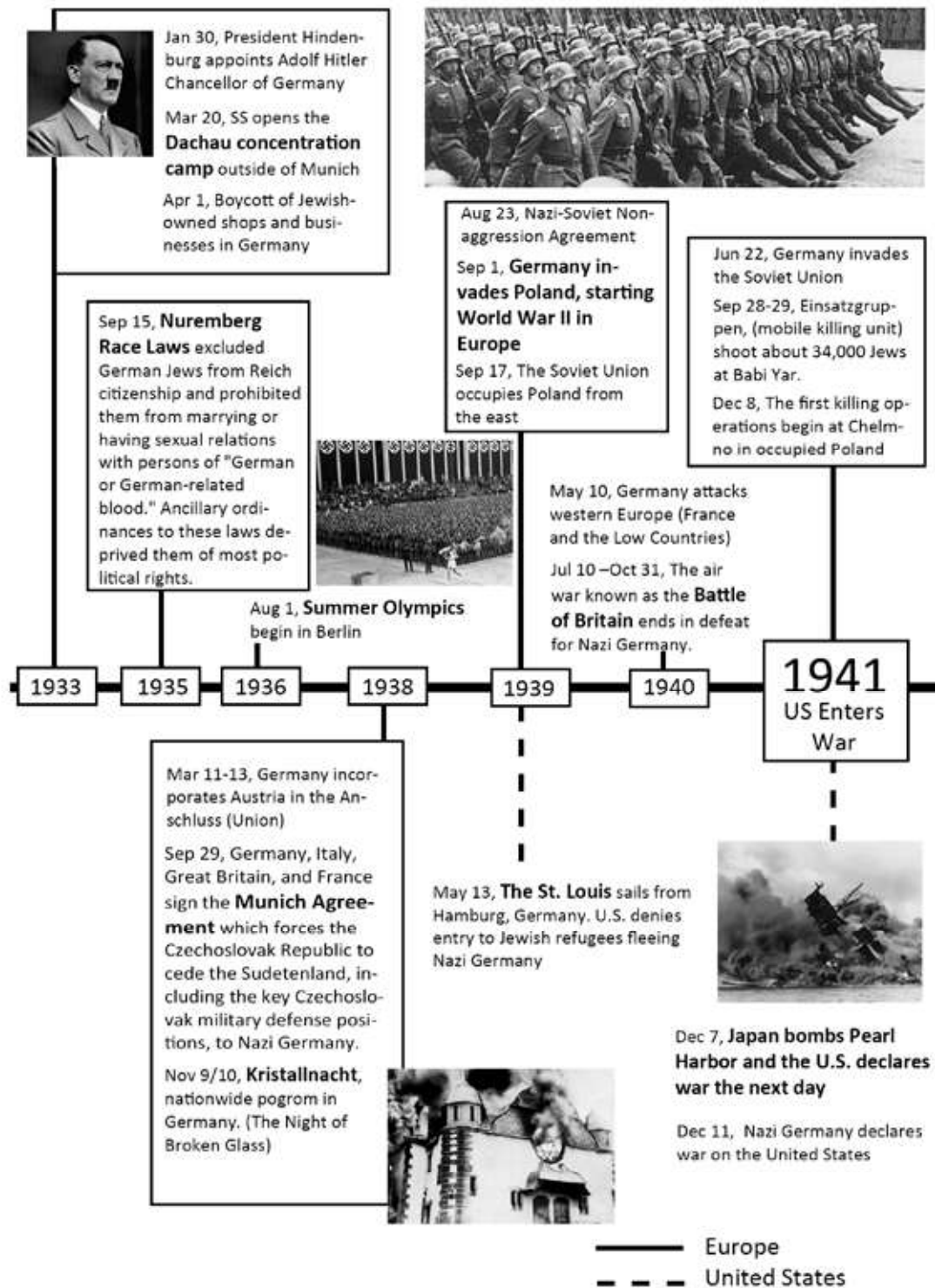
BJE: Builders of Jewish Education is dedicated to enhancing quality, ensuring access, and encouraging participation in full-time, part-time, and informal Jewish education throughout the Jewish communities of greater Los Angeles. BJE was founded in 1937 as the Bureau of Jewish Education, a department of the Los Angeles Jewish Federation and became an independent 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization in 1991.

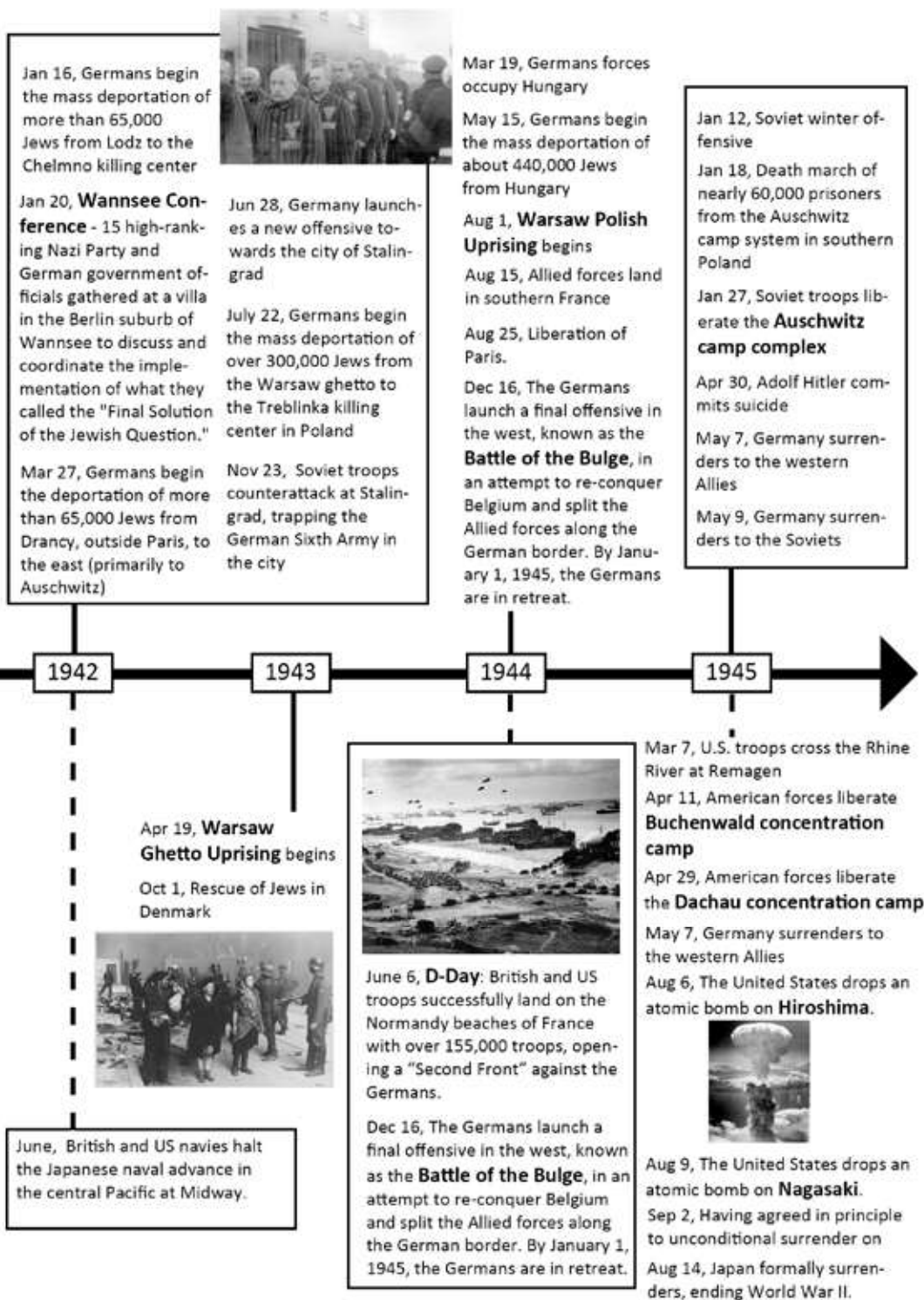
The March of the Living is an annual educational program, which brings students from all over the world to Poland, in order to study the history of the Holocaust and to examine the roots of prejudice, intolerance and hate. Since the first March of the Living was held in 1988, over 150,000 youth from around the world have marched down the same path leading from Auschwitz to Birkenau on Holocaust Remembrance Day.



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